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ABSTRACT

This is a handbook for mental health workers and human service providers who deal with Indochinese refugees. Part I of the booklet provides an overview of the Indochinese refugee situation, discussing the refugees' experience, how they came to the United States, how they have adjusted, and factors that service providers must consider in helping them. Part II presents background information on the history and culture of Cambodians, Laotians, Loa Hmong, Vietnamese, and ethnic Chinese refugees from Indochina. Two articles, "Vietnamese-American Intercultural Communication," by Nguyen Dang Liem, and "Health and Disease: The Indochinese Perspective," by Tran Minh Tung, are also included in this section. Finally, a list of resettlement agencies is provided. (Author/APM)

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WORKING WITH INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

A Handbook for Mental Health Workers and Human Service Providers

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INTRODUCTION

This brief pamphlet has been prepared for you: the professional, para-professional or volunteer working in the social service or mental health field.

Presently the Indochinese refugees in the United States number nearly 380,000 and by the end of 1981 another 150,000 will have arrived. These newcomers have survived a harrowing journey to freedom, and although they are resilient, capable and determined people, resettlement in this country has not been and will not be easy. We hope this pamphlet will help you understand more about the Indochinese refugees' past and present, and will assist you in providing them with more effective and appropriate services.

Because people who work with people are overburdened and short of time, this pamphlet has been arranged to provide an essential preliminary overview of the refugee situation in Part I while more detailed discussions of issues related to mental health and treatment modes have been collected in Part II.

Finally, a list of agencies with bilingual staff who work with Indochinese refugees has been included at the end of the pamphlet. The staff of these agencies, always available for consultation and language assistance, are eager to work with you toward better services for the Indochinese people.

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PART I: BASIC INFORMATION

WHO ARE THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES?

There are presently about 380,000 refugees from the war-torn areas of Southeast Asia in the United States. Before 1975 there were very few Indochinese in America, but the fall of Saigon in April of that year created a flood of refugees fearing political reprisals from the incoming Communist governments. Many of these refugees were assisted by the U.S. Government; official reception areas were set up in Guam, California, Pennsylvania and Arkansas to process these individuals, mostly Vietnamese, into American life. From 1975 to 1977, refugees continued to trickle out of Southeast Asia -- Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos -- but in 1978 unrelenting famine and political repression pushed vast numbers of refugees over the borders of Thailand and onto the seas in small, overcrowded boats. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Lao Hmong, Yao, and overseas Chinese literally piled up on the shores of Malaysia and Indonesia and squeezed desperately into prison-like camps along the Thai border. The United States Government has stood firm in its commitment to help, and monthly welcomes 14,000 Indochinese refugees to our land.

Because these refugees come from different countries, each with a distinct language, history, religion, and culture, it is misleading to lump them together as "Indochinese". Even among similar ethnic groups from the same country, there are distinctions such as urban-rural, educated-uneducated, and Christian-Buddhist. The major refugee groups are the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese-Chinese who never fully assimilated into Vietnamese life and still primarily speak a Chinese dialect, the Laotians from the lowlands of Laos and the tribal groups such as the Hmong and Yao from the Laotian highlands, the Laotian-Chinese, the Cambodians and the Cambodian-Chinese. However, because the cultures of these people tend to be Buddhist, their economies basically agricultural with an emphasis on rice farming, and their social structure strongly family and clan oriented, they share a number of customs and attitudes traditionally characterized as "Asian".

WHAT KIND OF EXPERIENCES HAVE THEY HAD?

The Indochinese refugees are survivors. They have survived the nearly continuous warfare that has plagued their land since World War II, the recent political turmoil, famine, economic uncertainties and, in Cambodia and perhaps parts of Laos, mass executions, and the dangerous escape which claimed probably half of all who set out. Finally, they have survived the disease-ridden, crowded refugee camps along the coasts of Malaysia and Indonesia and on the Thai border. As survivors they tend to be strong, determined, and aggressive, but psychologically tired.

Unlike immigrants, these people could not carefully weigh the alternatives between staying and leaving. Choices had to be made quickly, when opportunities existed. In 1975, eighty percent of the Vietnamese left with between two days and two hours notice -- pushed out by fear of reprisals and a refusal to live under communism. As time passed, other Vietnamese made more conscious decisions to leave, planning for the departure by gathering funds, food and necessities; but still these refugees had no assurance where they might eventually settle. Life in Vietnam seemed inhuman and unbearable; anywhere else at least offered hope.

The Lao Hmong, who cooperated closely with American troops during the Indochinese war, were pushed out by Pathet Lao troops sent to "subdue" (and if that didn't work, to eradicate) them. As they evacuated their homelands, they were gassed from aircraft and pursued by armed soldiers. Many did not make it as far as the Mekong River, and even among those that did, many failed to survive the treacherous swim across to Thailand.

The Cambodians who reached the camps before 1979 were fortunate, for they had escaped the mass executions and widespread starvation. From the spring of 1979 through the fall, famine was so total in Cambodia and the possibility of being caught in the cross-fire of the various armed factions so likely, that nearly half the remaining ambulatory Cambodians headed for the relative sanctuary of the Thai border. Considered as "displaced persons" rather than refugees of first asylum by the Thais, most Cambodians presently survive in a state of limbo in crowded camps, fed by United Nations rations. Thus, the number of Cambodians admitted to this country is less than other groups, but those that come often need considerable support and assistance.

The ethnic Chinese from all the countries, like non-assimilated ethnic groups everywhere, are the target of suspicion and antagonism by regimes attempting to consolidate power and control. This is especially true in Southeast Asia where much of the fighting still going on is between factions backed by Soviet Russia on one hand and by the Peoples' Republic of China on the other. The ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asia, therefore, have been forced to leave their homes and belongings, often by official policy, as in Vietnam.

HOW DO THE REFUGEES COME TO THE U.S.?

Each refugee who safely manages to reach one of the designated refugee camps in Southeast Asia is interviewed by a United Nations representative to ascertain that the internationally agreed upon requirements for refugee status have been met. Next, representatives of various countries which have agreed to accept Indochinese refugees periodically tour the camps, interviewing and selecting refugees in accord with their national guidelines. This selection (and "rejection") process too often means bitter disillusionment for the refugee who, having escaped, believed there was some place to go.

The United States gives priority to people with family in this country and then to people who have worked for our government. For emotionally close but genetically more distant relatives like siblings, aunts or uncles, or for people with no previous American connections, the wait to qualify for U.S. sponsorship is extended at best and futile at worst. Since many of the other accepting countries have priorities for specific skills and training, the United States has agreed to accept a large proportion of rural unskilled individuals. For the human services worker, this means that a large share of the refugees presently arriving will need intensive services, orientation and assistance to cope successfully with American life.

HOW HAVE THEY ADJUSTED TO THIS COUNTRY?

The Indochinese refugees adjust remarkably well to life in the United States. Naturally, those from urban centers who possess marketable skills settle in most quickly, while those who lack education, language abilities and experience with the hectic pace of a technological society have the most difficulty. Within a year, however, most are economically and psychologically self-sufficient. Over fifty percent take advantage of specially established English programs, some enter college or a vocational training program, and nearly all seem to cope fairly effectively with life in the United States.

Nevertheless, to minimize the initial culture shock and long-term stress of resettlement would be a disservice to the refugees. The greatest single complication is the sense of loss experienced by nearly every individual coming into this country. Homesickness can be overwhelming; future planning in a society with unknown rules and unpredictable events is nearly impossible; a sense of isolation can grow unabated; and the refugee can become confused and disoriented. Persistence and determination usually win out and amazingly few refugees require long term or intensive mental health services. Yet, the effects of being a refugee are long-term, and the stress of relocation and the recognition of losses sometimes bring reactions far down the road. And, there are those who have experienced unusually difficult passage or who view themselves as especially victimized, who may need extra help in the early stages of resettlement to maximize their potential for happiness in this country.

Initial Reactions and Culture Shock

"Culture shock" is a real phenomenon, and to some degree it is probably inevitable. Our daily lives are guided unconsciously by thousands of implicit cues in our environment, telling us what to feel, what to say, when to do something. Finding oneself in the middle of a new culture in which cues are difficult or impossible to interpret produces feelings of disorientation, inadequacy and isolation.

The most common symptoms of culture shock are:

disorientation in time
unusual fatigue
extreme mood swings
crying easily or laughing inappropriately
constant feelings of irritation and annoyance
general nervousness and restlessness
fearfulness, anxiety and withdrawal
inappropriate level of distress over small matters (bugs, lack of a favorite food, taste of the water, etc.)
antagonism or suspicion toward members of the new culture

For anyone who has traveled to another culture or even moved to an new town, this list probably looks familiar. The danger is not so much in the existence of the symptoms, but in the <u>degree</u> and <u>persistence</u> of the reaction.

The best treatment for culture shock, of course, is time, good orientation to help people read the new cues, an understanding of the syndrome, and sympathetic support during the stressful periods.

Adjustment Difficulties Among Refugees

Most Indochinese refugees are able to relocate, learn English and start new lives without manifesting serious social or emotional problems. Nevertheless, there are individuals who, because of past experiences, personality traits or particularly unusual stress, seem to incur a greater than average degree of distress. Since these individuals hopefully will eventually reach a social service or mental health worker like yourself, it might be valuable to discuss briefly those areas which seem particularly vulnerable in the adjustment process.

1) the aftermath of a stressful experience

As has been pointed out, the situation encountered by refugees differs from that faced by the immigrant. Both have to deal with culture shock, vocational adjustments and language acquisition but in addition the refugee is faced with a situation not of his own making. The immigrant chooses and plans for his move; the refugee does not. He makes the decision to leave quickly, motivated by fear, chased by hostile troops, driven by starvation and economic desperation.

Thus, as trauma theory reveals, the refugee has had no benefit of anticipatory planning and emotional processing; he feels manipulated by forces beyond his control and severely victimized. Because he has experienced a situation of "entrapment" in which he was totally unable to ameliorate the stress and danger, no amount of reassurance will ever restore his former sense of invulnerability -- that aspect of the ego which normally defends the individual against the fear created by the anomalies and atrocities of the world, allowing normal life to go on. One possible response is continued bouts with anxiety, depression, and feelings of unreality. Many refugees talk about the "'reality' of Saigon and the 'dream world' of America", and a few even wonder if it isn't actually true. Victimization also leads to a sense of persecution, and twinges of paranoia are not uncommon among some individuals.

2) grief and loss

The sense of grief and loss experienced by the refugees can be overwhelming. Not only have the refugees lost their homeland, friends, businesses and farms, but their sense of security, self-identity and much of their former self-esteem. They were seldom able to salvage important possessions or money for their new life; virtually all have had to leave relatives and family behind.

Grieving is most natural under the circumstances, but experience with resettling refugees has demonstrated that too often the refugee actually has little time or energy to grieve. Survival in the form of adequate employment, language learning and social adjustment becomes the priority, and losses are felt but seldom dealt with until months later. Even then, the uncertainty of the losses makes the whole process difficult: who is dead and who is alive? will I go home, or is this it? will my wife be able to join me? will I ever practice my former profession again?

The grief process is often manifested in continual fatigue, persistent depression, lack of confidence and frequent weeping spells. Anger -- sometimes in the form of belligerence or abusive behavior in the family -- is another symptom of unresolved grief. Anger and violence are attempts to deflect one's internal pain upon another, and the target of displacement can be a spouse or a less-favored child who survived.

Sometimes, during a painful revaluation the magnitude of the losses (a child? a profession? traditions?) over against present reality and future prospects, seem to render the escape as meaningless, absurd, a mistake. This can be related to the most painful loss of all: the loss of one's sense of adequacy as a competent, responsible and caring human being, acceptable in the sight of others and in one's own sight. These are times when the individual may feel consumed by a deep, inexpressible shame -- perhaps a form of 'survivor guilt' -- at having left people behind or having left at all, at having made the "wrong choice" although a choice may never have existed, or at one's national origins as disgraceful and degenerate. Some have articulated their escape to America as a betrayal, blaming themselves consciously or unconsciously for the fate of their relatives and countrymen and questioning their right to live when others died.

There are many parallels here with the Jewish survivors after the holocaust of World War II, and for many of the Indochinese refugees the prerequisite for the grieving process is the sorting out of these feelings. They need to find within themselves the special strengths that go along with being a survivor, strengths that can help them rebuild meaningful lives in this culture. Some of the refugees will need professional help -- perhaps your help -- in order to do this.

3) lack of social and familial support

With the possible exception of the urban Lao, the Indochinese value and practice some form of the extended family. Not all relatives were able or willing to leave, and thus nearly all refugee families view themselves as "incomplete" even if the nuclear family is intact. Coming from a sociey where family members depend upon mutual aid and goodwill in times of sickness, emotional turmoil, death, childbirth, and marriage, the individual feels alone and insecure without family and close community friends around. Single people or those who have left spouses behind are particularly high risks for emotional difficulties, and the lonely Indochinese refugee will spend considerable effort and resources to locate people with whom he feels a sense of belonging and support. The American immigration procedures which fail to classify brothers and sisters as immediate kin also contribute to the sense of separation and loss felt by frustrated refugees attempting to reunite their families.

Several phenomena have been particularly perplexing to Americans working with the Southeast Asian refugees. One is the tendency on the part of the people to move again after initial settlement, undoing all the careful, painstaking arrangements by sponsors and social workers. This is particularly true of some of the tribal people, who very soon make plans to join a clan community or distant relatives even if they are living halfway across the continent. Social and emotional needs of the individual refugee are seldom met by Americans who do not speak the refugee's language and do not share

important cultural attitudes and experiences. What is known as "secondary migration" is comprehensible if one just thinks of the way Americans overseas seek each other out and congregate in certain neighborhoods in foreign cities; in the midst of strangeness, familiarity is a great comfort and thus, at least at first, people seek their own kind.

Another confusing situation concerns second wives who arrive in this country to find they have no legal status and thus find themselves in a socially and economically untenable position. There have been cases where individuals have gone to great lengths to conceal the fact of two families coexisting together; more commonly, however, the man feels compelled to choose one family over the other and thus one wife and set of children are paradoxically set adrift (quite alone) upon reaching American shores. These are extremely tragic cases to handle, especially when the ties between individuals are still quite strong.

4) vocational adjustment

Because one's professional or vocational status is so intimately entwined with identity, social respect and self-esteem, adjustment for the refugee is not just adjustment to a new culture and language, but to a new self vis-a-vis others and in one's own eyes. Part of the cultural baggage the refugee brings from Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia is a deep respect for social class, educational and professional distinctions and prestige. For many a newcomer, regardless of talents and former position, the lack of English means doing menial or blue collar work. Old skills may not be marketable in this society, and the man who once provided competently for his family finds himself unemployed or engaged in work which barely feeds his children. While it is true that for many the standard of living here is better by far than what they left, for others little can compensate for the loss of the family farm or shop. And there are those refugees who have no skills at all, except, as one Hmong wrote recently on an application, "guerilla fighting."

Women too have vocational adjustments. Most obvious are wives who, along with their husbands, soon discover the necessity of two paychecks to feed their large families. Few Indochinese, even those who worked for the American forces, are proficient enough in English to find good clerical jobs. Other women, raised to stay within the home and avoid encounters with the opposite sex, are forced into service sector jobs which demand new attitudes at direct odds with their earlier socialization. Husbands find the change in their wives threatening, yet must accept the inevitable. Some of the women, such as the Hmong, have cottage industry skills or practice domestic handicrafts which are potentially saleable, but find the complex marketing system of American sales difficult to penetrate.

5) sex role adjustments

Still another source of familiar stress and individual breakdown is the necessity of altering long-time gender roles and prerogatives. This is where cultural differences are felt most strongly.

The male's difficulty, already mentioned, in adjusting to the role of a less competent provider is also occasionally exacerbated by a wife's ability to get higher wages. Those women who speak English, learned while working when husbands were away at the front, are initially more employable than their soldier husbands. Where formerly the male negotiated between the family and the outside world on the basis of superior education and greater extra-familial experience and understanding, it is often the female in the refugee family -- especially among the Vietnamese -- who speaks some English and becomes by necessity the negotiator and decision-maker. Related to this problem is that of marital readjustment with both spouses back in the home. Like the wives of World War II servicemen, the women may resent the attempted reestablishment of traditional male dominance in the household they ruled for years without interference. There are even a few refugee wives for whom the role of homemaker is new and less preferred than that of "breadwinner".

Many other wives, however, find the opposite true. While husbands fear the economic independence of their wives and are threatened by the sexually integrated work world of the United States (the sexes are segregated in rural Southeast Asian daily life), the women quietly mourn the loss of their mothering role. Tired and frustrated at the end of a work day, these women turn for support and physical assistance to men who have traditionally scorned housework and child care. And at a time when their self-esteem is at low-ebb, it is difficult indeed for the traditional husband to further risk his self-image to become a household helper. Usual help in the form of grandmother or aunts is simply not there.

Clearly, the women are also less able to provide comfort and relief to their husbands as they find themselves pulled in many new directions. The men struggle through a working day in a language which is all but unintelligible, at the job which they are still learning, and come home expected to attend English class or study vocabulary. Some women, isolated and imprisoned in their small and ugly apartments, react with resentment and frustration to their husbands as they come and go. Their constant companion, the television, suggests new roles and attitudes which are as unattainable as they are untypically American. Nevertheless, these new norms and expectations are introduced into daily life, and the gap between their present existence and the "American ideal" of the media is a source of nagging discontentment and sense of failure.

6) differential rates of acculturation

Often family strife results from changing values and attempting to renegotiate relationships and expectations in accord with the apparent demands of the new culture. Some people seem to acculturate faster and with greater ease, and the resulting personality shifts and attitudinal changes can cause deep rifts between friends, spouses, parents and children.

Young people who are especially peer-oriented quickly adopt customs and behaviors which seem acceptable to the peer groups but are often totally unacceptable to the Asian parents. When adult refugees are asked what worries them the most about living in the United States, one of the two most frequent answers is the difficulty of raising "good Asian children" -- obedient, responsible, properly mannered, and sans pre-marital sex. Public displays of affection are quiet distasteful to the Indochinese, and the prevalence of pre-marital sex and pregnancy especially threatening. Lack of respect and

care for the elderly is the second, but related, most common concern. These add up to a severe "generation gap" in families where Americanized teenagers flaunt their independence before saddened parents who risked so much for the sake of their children and to preserve their traditional values.

A further source of stress is the arrival of new family members from the camps. The new families are disturbed by the Americanization of the settled family and find that a cultural gap separates them after only a few years. The settled family, of course, wants to extend total hospitality, and stretches their economic means to the breaking point. The family member who is the relative of the newly arriving family groups often experiences unbelievable strain as he/or she acts as cultural mediator between the new group and his/her own westernized family.

Cultural Differences Encountered in Adjustment

The Indochinese share a "Asian" cultural heritage, which suggests that they have a slightly different value system than the typical American. Some of the cultural differences faced by the Indochinese revolve around the following preferences:

a) An emphasis on harmony and smooth human relations. Americans are seldom shy about confrontation and value "being up front" with people, while most Asians give priority to pleasant personal relationships, helping people avoid a loss of face, and maintaining an outward calm which assures easy social relations. Thus, people in Asia do not pointedly disagree ("yes" may mean "yes, I understand your point of view" rather than "yes, I agree with you" or "yes, I will do what you say") and most decisions are made jointly and unanimously to enforce the continued harmony of the group.

b) A "being" rather than "doing" orientation. The American proclivity for action, control, progress and harnessing nature is indulged by Asians, but recognized as neither important nor even particularly realistic.

Along with this sense of "being" is an acceptance of permanence. For instance, rather than job-hopping constantly, always with an eye on a "better" job, Asians value loyalty and the personal relations formed at work, preferring stability and predictability to constant opportunity. This appreciation of permanence is an important factor in Southeast Asian behavior, and provides a clue to the careful observation of interpersonal rituals, the preference for vocational training over immediate but temporary employment, and an early search for a permanent residential location. The Hmong are somewhat of an exception to the latter, expressing their need for permanence by moving where ever their community relocates in order to maintain personal ties.

c) A strong sense of group identity. This translates into family loyalty, obedience to parents and responsibility to relatives. It also means that achievement-oriented motives are suspect unless it is clear that such motives are for the sake of the group. Decisions are seen to affect many and therefore need to be made collectively. Problems are kept within the family circle and family members are not "betrayed" to outsiders.

This preference for collectivity also means that even very large families will struggle to stay together, both physically and emotionally. Mothers do not easily trust their children with non-relatives, teenagers are expected to remain an integral part of the family process, and older people are cared for at home.

d) An appreciation of order and structure. This appreciation stems from Taoist and Buddhist concepts about nature and unity, but it is carried over to the secular world. Hierarchical relationships are seen not as better or worse, but as complementary and therefore an equally essential part of the whole. While identity is defined through one's place in family, community and the cosmos, self-esteem comes not so much from which part is played, but how well the role is performed. Male and female behavior, that between superiors and inferiors, relations between ranks of relatives, and so on are well proscribed, predictable, and the source of security, social ease and considerable mutual assistance.

e) The importance of saving face. The Indochinese are very aware of their "public self" and try hard to avoid embarrassment, overt show of emotions, or confrontation. This sensitivity is related to the concept of harmony and non-competition. In practical terms, this means that asking direct questions (or answering too directly) is considered uncouth, "talking things out" is avoided on the basis that the possibility of confrontation or embarrassment is too great, the use of a go-between is preferred, and one should be very careful about incurring obligation or forcing it on others. Sponsors often have difficulty understanding the hesitancy to accept gifts given in American good will, but the Indochinese spirit of permanence, mutual obligation and non-expression of emotion makes gift-giving a very delicate thing.

f) The value of education and scholarly pursuits. Because of the pervasive Confucian background in Southeast Asia, there is considerable value and trust put into book learning. Although it is often more "qualification" than "education", people with years of schooling are looked up to and often given positions of great responsibility, regardless of their particular field. Thus Asian parents are sometimes surprised by the irreverent attitude of Americans toward the educational system and the carelessness of American children toward their study. Training and ESL classes are thus highly valued, and this faith in "going to school" is sometimes in conflict with the need for immediate employment, exacerbated by the desire for a "permanent job".

WHAT ARE SOME PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN HELPING REFUGEES?

In many ways, of course, the Indochinese refugees are no different from most of the other people you work with. They respond to genuine concern, care and empathy, and they need your skills in mental health, therapy and social service. But at the same time it is important to remember that their perspective on the world is not the same as your perspective, and therefore you may have to work a bit harder at understanding and communicating that understanding to them.

First, there are a number of non-verbal behaviors which might upset your client: pointing, touching his head or any part of his body with a lower part of your own body (an arm around the waist is sometimes acceptable while around the shoulder is considered vulgar), male-female touching including shaking hands for some of the more rural people, beckoning with an upturned palm, raising your voice, sitting with your foot aimed or upturned at your client, and blowing your nose in public. Most of these things have to do with superstition or imply hostility or sexual advances, and should be avoided.

Second, there are the previously mentioned cultural differences in values and attitudes. What might seem 'right' or 'obvious' to an American is not necessarily so to the person from another culture. Different assumptions mean different goals, and therefore different strategies. Cultural relativism is a fact; standards of behavior and attitudes are implanted by socialization and are not inherently right or wrong. Intercultural counseling demands careful attention to the difference between the helper's assumptions and the client's assumptions about the world.

Third, because Asian culture places value on the non-expression of personal emotions, stresses the importance of intuitive knowledge and sometimes discourages articulation for fear of disrupting the existing harmony, it is often difficult for the refugee client to "talk about his problems and feelings". Things which are contradictory to his upbringing and value system include things like discussing family matters with relative strangers, searching for abstract meanings for concrete problems, openly displaying emotion or "losing face" in some way, making decisions individually which will affect too many others, and questioning the 'givens' of his role. Accustomed to accepting advice and help from teachers, doctors and people of high professional status, the Asian will probably expect a more directive approach in counseling, and will be baffled if the helper is too non-directive or client-centered.

A model which allows the helper to provide concrete help, even to the point of temporary acceptance of regressive dependency, seems to build client trust, both in the efficacy of the helper and his sincere concern for the client. By indicating that help is available, the pervasive sense of isolation and helplessness felt by so many refugees can be defused and the client's ego functions reenergized.

It is also important that the counseling techniques used with Indochinese are congruent with the priority they place upon smooth interpersonal relations. Negative responses, especially abrupt ones, are seen as causing the person spoken to a severe loss of face, and for that reason direct requests

made by the client (requests which might be fielded with an ethnically different client) should not be turned away lightly, but either fulfilled or answered noncommitedly with, "yes, perhaps we'll have to see about that later" or "Let me think about that for a while." Similarly, Indochinese clients are less likely to openly disagree with or correct a statement or plan devised by a counselor, since such a correction would be seen as an impudent questioning of the counselor's professional competency and status. The other side of the coin is that Indochinese can feel quite embarrassed or even insulted if a gift or a favor is not accepted; the implication is that the giver is found unworthy.

Fourth, one must always be translating and interpreting cultural categories when working cross-culturally. Traditional clients lack a Western positivist tradition, with its belief in mechanical and linear cause and effect; psychological concepts such as repression, the superego and other linquistic conventions concerned with motivation and cognition are non-existent in the client's world. On the other hand, there is a strong belief in animism and a resulting faith in fortune-telling, palmistry, reincarnation and the influence of deeds in a past life. The American worker must therefore 1) find the possible cultural equivalent for the syndrome or symptom described by the Indochinese client, 2) attempt to discover the meaning of the discomfort as perceived by the client, and 3) determine how the problem would have been treated in the home country. Sometimes, the best treatment may be an indigenous one, such as a shaman can provide. Community elders or respected relatives are often excellent conjunct therapists. The difficulty arises when and if the native treatment modes are ineffective or inappropriate, as they sometimes are with serious illness. Then it may be necessary to teach a new orientation, or view of the world, to the client in order to make him accessible to psychological help. It may also be necessary to employ medication, and if so, the client must understand the reasons for the medicine, the possible reactions, the time necessary before improvement is apparent, and the importance of taking the drug according to instructions.

In most cases, mental stress is manifested in ways very similar to Western ways. For instance, continual movement or aimless pacing, nail biting, sleeplessness and eating disturbances, fatigue or fainting and gastro-intestinal distress usually signal anxiety. Depression is often expressed by continually looking down, silence and isolation, a careless appearance, constant sighing and persistent answering of yes or no regardless of appropriateness. More serious mental illness is recognized by confused and incoherent speech, talking to oneself or animals and inanimate objects, aimless behavior, constant smiling and failure to sleep. Suicidal tendencies are difficult to recognize in any client, but perhaps more so cross-culturally because of the slightly different orientation toward death and related customs. Although suicide has been infrequent among the refugees, it is worth noting that shaving one's head for a Cambodian is an overt statement of severe depression and the contemplation of suicide, wearing white clothes is sometimes used by Vietnamese to indicate preparation for suicide, and wearing brand new clothes for a Lao Hmong may indicate a readiness to die.

Fifth, one must always be on the lookout for personal stereotyping. Any attempt to describe a culture or an individual from that culture must by nature be over-generalized and a statistical composite. In fact, there may be no member of that culture who totally fits the attempted description. Listening to the client, checking with him about what is unclear, sharing views to

determine precise attitudes, and above all, recognizing him as a unique individual -- these are critical to good intercultural counseling. The job is particularly difficult with bi-cultural clients -- and most of the refugees are certainly that to some degree -- because he is as sensitive as the counselor to expectations and cultural differences, and he may be trying hard to minimize them <u>for you.</u>

Finally, there are a number of well-trained social service and resettlement bilingual personnel who are available for consultation or a special session to assure that the client understands directions. These people are excellent mediators between the two cultures, and can be of invaluable assistance with Indochinese clients.

PART II: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following are five brief articles on the peoples and culture of Southeast Asia. Each national group has its own unique history and culture, of course, and if you are helping a Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, Vietnamese or Chinese individual, knowledge about their particular background, attitudes and communication style will be crucial to your effectiveness.

Also included in this section are an article on Vietnamese sociolinguistics which provides excellent background on Indochinese intercultural communication and a paper on Indochinese attitudes toward health and disease with a brief comparison on western and traditional medical practices. These are written by Indochinese experts and thus represent primary source material on these subjects.

The Cambodians (Khmer)

Cambodia is a small, rich agricultural country lying next to Thailand in Southeast Asia. Once the center of a huge and powerful empire, the people still proudly preserve their cultural traditions and value their gentle, family-oriented style of life. Most Cambodians are farmers; western influences were mostly confined to the capital Phnom Penh and a few other urban centers. Because the land was so fertile and the population small (about 5-1/2 million before the recent holocaust), good harvest, a comfortable life and strong village unity was the rule. The horror experienced by the Cambodian people in the last five years has halved the population; famine is widespread and the political situation so precarious that help from the rest of the world in the form of food-stuffs, seed, and medical aid is still being channeled primarily to favored areas and populations while others are ignored and allowed to perish.

For the individual Cambodian refugee, the senseless killing of innocent people and the almost total destruction of the economic and social fabric of his or her country has been psychologically devastating. Cambodians who reached the camps before the recent well-publicized famine were accepted as refugees by Thailand, but recent arrivals at the border are designated "displaced persons" which effectively disqualifies them as potential emigrants and mandates forced repatriation. About 400,000 Cambodians are on Thai soil, but probably 600,000 are (forced to remain) on the Cambodian side of the border among the constant skirmishes between opposing bands of armed soldiers. But even those Cambodians who have arrived in the United States are seldom positive about resettlement; they hope to preserve what they can of their culture and traditions until they are able to return safetly to their homeland. Of course, many are more realistic about the meaning of being a refugee and realize that return is very improbable.

About ninety percent of the Cambodian population was Khmer, with the other ten percent divided between Vietnamese and Chinese. The origin of the Khmer people is difficult to trace precisely; the Indian influence is perhaps most apparent, but in fact the people are probably a mixture of local tribesmen of Indonesian origin and successive waves of Indian, Javanese and Chinese immigrant invaders. Because of the richness of the country, these newcomers stayed, intermarried and became farmers, creating a rich multilayered cultural fabric uniquely Cambodian.

Before the Fifth Century, several distinct groups inhabited the land now called Cambodia. The Khmer nation emerged under the leadership of the Fu Nan people but control shifted to the rulers of Chen La in the Sixth Century. Chen La stretched to the Chinese border, was briefly conquered by the Malays, and then regrouped to unify the peoples living along the lower Mekong River region. The years from AD 802 to AD 1432 was known as the Angkor period, and during this time the famous Angkor Wat (temple) was built, hospitals, schools and libraries were founded, and the arts flourished. At the end of the 13th Century, the empire disintegrated into small kingdoms, often ruled by Thai vassals. The struggle for territory between the Thais and the Khmers, and between the encroaching Annam (now part of Vietnam) and the Khmers, has continued for centuries and still goes on.

French influence appeared as it did elsewhere in Indochina around the middle of the 19th Century when the founder of the present Cambodian dynasty, bound in dual vassalage to Thailand and Annam, requested aid from France. Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1864, and in 1887 joined the French Indochinese Union. After World War II, King Sihanouk declared independence but France attempted to regain control in September 1945 by allowing Cambodia to become an "autonomous kingdom" in the French Union. Finally, in 1954 while France was bogged down in the war with Vietnam, Sihanouk completed a series of treaties with France for complete independence.

The events of the Sixties and Seventies created havoc in Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk and his policy of "extreme neutrality" was overthrown by a U.S.-supported military regime headed by General Lon Nol. Soon, the Indochinese war spread deeper and deeper into Cambodia, and American saturation bombing intended to wipe out Viet Cong soldiers based along the Cambodian border actually pushed the Vietnamese further inland, resulting in the devastation of much of the Cambodian countryside. In the wake of the Vietnamese troops and American bombs came the Khmer Rouge. As these Chinese-backed radical communists gained control of the country, rural refugees streamed into Phnom Penh, swelling the capital to ten times its original population of 300,000. Pol Pot, now infamous for his brutality and destruction of Cambodia as a viable nation, emptied the cities of their people, demanded forced labor in the fields, destroyed the industrialized sector of the economy and murdered hundreds of thousands of people with education or ties to foreign culture or institutions.

The culture so valued by the Cambodian people is basically Buddhist, family-centered, and full of appreciation for art and dancing. The Cambodians, like their neighbors the Lao, are followers of Theravada Buddhism, although they mix in many beliefs in spirits and mysticism. Theravada Buddhism emphasizes merit, or good behavior, in one's daily life; good conduct will result in a fortunate reincarnation. Ill fortune in this life is due to past sins, and should be born with grace since such fate is unchangeable. Buddhism emphasizes that happiness comes with an acceptance of life and detachment from desire; since this life is impermanent, one should endure and enjoy it, rather than attempt to alter its path. Cambodians also have a healthy respect for the world of the spirits, or neak ta, and are careful to honor them for fear of dire consequences. Fortune telling, shamans, and magic potents are very popular.

The Cambodians prefer a close nuclear family, although extended kin relationships are respected and valued. In the rural areas especially, the extended family does often exist as a single household because of economic necessity. Gender roles are traditional: boys bring honor to the family through achievement in the community or in a religious life, while girls are most useful in an advantageous marriage. Children are loved and big families valued; this is especially true among the refugees who feel obligated to perpetuate the Khmer race and culture.

Social distinction and status rankings are common in the society, but the urban importance of nobility and westernized social life is absent among the rural commoners, who make up most of the refugee population. However, farmers and city dwellers alike generally regard the Cambodian monarchy as the symbolic unity of religion and government, and the monarchy has played an important role in Cambodian culture. To some degree the priests partake of this attitude of respect and deference. The clergy has traditionally been responsible for the education of the village males (few Cambodians are schooled very far in western science or ideas) and still play a crucial role in festivals, household ceremonies, rites of passage, healing and social disputes.

Cambodians are sometimes stereotyped as shy, humble and submissive, and easy going. In fact, a certain polite reserve does seem to be common among the Khmer people, but they are also often frank, and will be quite honest about their feelings and opinions. Because continual smiling is a Cambodian social characteristic, they are sometimes mistaken as passive and obsequious. In face, they are very conscious of affronts and "face" is very important. Their tendency to be conservative and easy going stems from the ubiquitous nature of Cambodian Buddhism, which denies the usefulness of material gain or improvement.

There are a number of well-educated and forceful leaders among the Cambodian refugees, and they are presently working hard to form self-help organizations and discover ways to carry on cultural traditions. But many of the rural Cambodians seem somewhat out of step in the frantic life of this country, and for many the adjustment to America will be difficult, exacerbated by their bewildering sense of loss and disorientation in a world seemingly gone mad. Many also carry strong feelings of resentment at Americans for having contributed to the loss of their country and a pervasive sense of distrust toward the Vietnamese whom they see as old and persistent enemies.

The Lao

Laos is a small, beautiful country lying to the west of Vietnam, separated from it by rugged mountains. Most of the three million people are engaged in agriculture, although there are several large urban centers which boast a good deal of French influence in life style, education and the arts. Like Cambodia and unlike Vietnam, however, the traditional culture of Laos is fundamentally more Indian than Chinese. Religion, literature, art forms, and even language can be traced to Indian Buddhism and Hindi roots, although Chinese culture has its place too, especially with some of the minority peoples.

Nearly half the Lao population are ethnic Lao, who are closely related to the Northern Thai people and share with them their Sino-Indian cultural traditions and Theravada Buddhism. Most of these Lao-Thai people are wet-rice farmers, living in a stable traditional society without the modern amenities found in more industrialized countries. Only in the larger cities is life "urban" in the western sense. The other half of the population is composed of other Thai-related peoples who speak languages closely akin to the dominant Lao but generally possess a more tribal way of life and are less Buddhist than animist; the Sino-Tibetan people such as the Hmong (Meo) and Yao who are relatively recent migrants from southernmost China about 150 years ago and live in the more mountainous areas, and the Non-Khmer people (Kha) who live in the highland regions and are probably descendents of the country's original inhabitants.

The first mention of the Lao people historically is by the Chinese who noted their existence beyond the Yangtze River before 800 BC. The Lao established a strong kingdom around the 8th Century which lasted until 1253 AD when Kublai Khan destroyed the region. These peoples -- including the Lao-Thai, Mon and Meo tribes -- then moved down the Indochinese peninsula, displacing the original people called Kha who were under Khmer control. The first real Laotian kingdom began in 1353 A.D. with the establishment of Lan Xang and remained strong and prosperous until 1571 when it was overrun by the Burmese.

A little over a hundred years later, the Lao were able to reassert control in the form of three autonomous kingdoms: Vientiane, Champassek and Luang Prabang. Internal warfare among the rulers of these separate states continued until the French established control toward the end of the 1800s. After World War II, there was an attempt to achieve independence but the French moved back into Indochina almost immediately. A government in exile was formed in Bangkok, but with the neutralists and the leftists as dissenting members. When Laos joined the French Union as an autonomous member, everyone returned to Laos except, of course, the leftist Souphanouvong who created the Pathet Lao. 1953 saw Laos gain complete independence, but unfortunately her post-independence history is full of unstable coalitions, Pathet Lao attacks and pressure to become involved in the Vietnam conflict. This ultimate involvement was disastrous for the country, and finally in 1973 the leftists gained control to establish the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Lao are flexible, adaptable people who value harmony in interpersonal relations, autonomy, and a graceful, gentle style of life. The household, usually the nuclear family but sometimes including members of the extended kinship system, is the basic economic and social unit; usually all the family

members work together on the land or in a small business. Lao women, while usually confined to a domestic role, nevertheless have considerable influence in the family, and also often inherit land or, if they are the youngest daughter, the family home site. The home site is important to the Lao for it symbolizes the existence and continuation of the family.

The village has traditionally been the primary political unit in Laos. Because of the rural agricultural economy, city officials were generally unable to influence village politics and customs to any significant extent, and thus the Lao are used to little interference in their daily life. Mandatory taxation, government standards, health regulations, compulsory schooling -- these are areas that the independent, community-oriented Lao find highly controlled in the United States.

Socially, the traditional society has consisted of the bureaucracy, the clergy and the commoners. The royal family and nobility usually were concerned with political and governmental affairs. Social ranks and titles were clear, and there were prescribed patterns of speech, dress and behavior. Since the French influence, however, these layers of society began to interweave, and there was a greater sense that the individual could change rank due to merit and achievement. Nevertheless, there has been a general acceptance of social distinctions as a fact of life, and it is sometimes hard for Lao in this country to ignore former status. The great differences between educated and uneducated, urban and rural, Buddhist and animist, have meant that the Lao refugee community has not been as quick to form cohesive units as some of the other groups.

The Lao are strongly Theravada Buddhist, a more Indianized form of Buddhism than is practiced in Japan, China and most of Vietnam. Theravada Buddhism emphasizes merit -- the accumulation of good deeds which allow the individual to be reborn into a better situation and to avoid ill fortune. Nirvana, which is the perfect release from suffering, desire, and constant rebirth can be achieved only through a strict religious life. This is somewhat different than Mahayana Buddhism as practiced in Northeast Asia with its belief in a benevolent Buddhahood which makes salvation and peace available to those who believe and practice the rituals. Buddhism also teaches that one should follow the moral eight-fold path and cultivate a detachment from striving and desire, since all things are impermanent. Unhappiness results from attachment to worldly things; the result is a philosophy which emphasizes a flexible attitude toward life which Westerners sometimes characterize as "fatalistic", non-striving and noninterfering.

Coexisting with Buddhism is a strong belief in spirits and magical rites. There are a number of tutelary spirits which are primarily guardian in nature, but can cause illness and trouble if not shown proper respect. Many of the priests also function much like shamans, conferring power on popular Buddha figurines before they are worn to ward off evil, and providing prayers, fortune telling and astrological forecasts. Other individuals are animist fortunetellers, astrologists, and sorcerers, and are consulted often about daily affairs. There is also a strong belief in certain magical drugs to ward off wounds and illnesses.

The Hmong of Laos

The Lao Hmong, like the Yao tribesmen, live in the highland and mountainous regions, and are a nomadic, agricultural people. Most emigrated in the middle 1800's to Northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma, probably to seek fertile new land for farming and herding and because of hostility from their Chinese neighbors. The Chinese have always called these tribal people Miao -- hence the American name Meo -- but the people themselves prefer Hmong, which means free. The Hmong became well-known during the Vietnam conflict as courageous, pro-American guerilla fighters.

The Hmong have always valued their freedom and autonomy. Living in the highlands of Laos, they had relatively little contact with the Laotian monarchy or government structures, and generally ruled themselves through headmen in each village district. They speak their own language, of Sino-Tibetan origins, although many can also understand Lao. Most experienced little education, although small numbers attended high school in Vientiane and some 35 attended school abroad. The Lao Government, in tandem with A.I.D., began village schools in the middle sixties, but success was spotty.

At present the Hmong are not wanted in Laos; in many areas they remain actively at war with the ruling Pathet Lao. During the fall and winter of 1977-78 the communist government apparently unleashed a search and destroy operation against the Hmong, who had fought so valiantly with the American Special Forces during the Indochinese Civil War. Those Hmong who had remained after 1975 now attempted to reach Thailand; many were ambushed, napalmed, and gassed. Lao and Hmong refugees are still straggling out of Laos, and the refugee camps are full of Laotians, 80% of whom belong to the Hmong tribe.

Since the beginning of the war the Hmong have gone through both rapid social change and an atrocious decimation of their people. Living peacefully in the mountains where the climate was cool and disease was scarce, the Hmong were basically dry rice farmers, using a slash-and-burn method of agriculture which encouraged relocation for fresh fields every few years. They also cultivated vegetables and opium for cash, raised livestock, and were well known for their fine bulls and well-trained horses. The men were exceptional hunters and also carried on trade with the lower villages. The women managed all domestic chores, seldom venturing beyond the village and fields; in this country the men do all the shopping and the women, who miss the village social life and lack the skills for urban exploration, are virtually cultural prisoners in their apartments. Only a few have found an outlet for their famous needle work and embroidery.

In previous times, soldiering was not considered a fit or respectable occupation, and the Hmong always tried to purchase replacement labor when the government requested military duty or work forces. However, as the Indo-chinese conflict spread during the fifties, General Vang Pao, a well-educated Hmong in the Royal Lao Army, was persuaded to rally his people in support of rightist forces in 1959. Later, after the truce in Laos, the Hmong loyally backed the neutralist forces and continued to help downed American pilots, ward off communist infiltration, harass Viet Cong and Pathet Lao troops and carry off other important military missions. Starting with the well- trained and couragous cadre who had fought with General Vang Pao against the French, the Hmong army grew to be a formidable force against the communists.

During French rule, only a few Hmong had gone to the capital to school. In the 1960's there were governmental attempts to provide villages with schools and health clinics, elementary school graduates were given courses in teaching and para-medicine, and a semblance of modernization arrived at the Hmong doorstep. More Hmong ventured to the lowlands for secondary education, and some thirty-five even went abroad for higher education. In other ways, however, they remained unchanged. The Hmong still clung to their tribal ways, valuing the mutual assistance of the clan and extended family, governing themselves through heads of households and village headmen. The division of labor between men and women was distinct and complementary; it was very difficult when men left for war, and disastrous when they did not return. Since the Hmong prefer large families, there are many fatherless children, although sister marriage is not unheard of in such situations.

The strong attachment to the spirit world, the tlan or phi in Lao, has not lessened. The animistic Hmong emphasize the importance of harmony with all things, since spirits are ubiquitous, and next to the headman, the shaman is the most important individual in the society. Ancestor worship is tied intimately into the world of the spirits and Hmong are careful to observe various rites and ceremonies. They are a religious people -- perhaps superstitious in the eyes of Westerners -- and value harmony and adaptability.

They share many traits with other Asians such as respect for the elderly, strong family unity and a collective rather than self-oriented pattern of achievement, saving face (avoiding public shame), and a strong value placed upon children. Their particular clan orientation and deference to lineage and household heads are especially strong. Women have not been encouraged to go to school since a wife well-skilled in domestic chores is so important in the culture; girls marry young and devote themselves to their husbands and numerous children. Babies are allowed to nurse as long as the mother has milk and there is little forceful regulation of youngsters. As children grow up, they are introduced slowly to their role expectations. Recently, the Hmong have become more puritanical about sexuality, but there is some indication that in the not too distant past there was a certain acceptance of natural sexuality among young people which was ritualized into festival games and celebrations.

It was estimated that the Hmong numbered about 300,000 in the 1960s. At least 30,000 -- ten percent of the entire population -- were wartime fatalities. At present it is estimated that about 15,000 Hmong are in the United States, a few thousand elsewhere, and about 140,000 in refugee camps. There is hardly a family that has not lost at least one member, and often more. Needless to say, such a dire loss of people, especially men, has taken its toll on the solidarity and culture of the Hmong.

The Vietnamese

The first Indochinese refugees to arrive in 1975 were predominately Vietnamese. Most had connections with the South Vietnamese government or with the American military, embassy, or commercial enterprises in Vietnam, and therefore spoke some English, were able to escape with some money and/or possessions, and were educated, skilled and highly adaptable. The Vietnamese who followed in the later waves of boat people had very different experiences. Some were Chinese who chose to risk escape rather than removal to the new economic zones. Others were relatives of the original refugees who had planned to leave since 1975 and traded their material wealth for the space on a boat. Still others were desperate rural people who saw themselves facing starvation and continuing oppressive control and therefore set out in any craft they could find. None of these people are likely to speak English, and some of them have either no skills or skills which are not easily transferred to the industrial and urban environment. Thus, the Vietnamese as a group manifest many differences depending on their class, education, previous occupation and experiences during the war and after.

Because Vietnam was dotted by large cities and sea ports, influenced by French culture and education, and exposed to American movies, magazines and products, it was perhaps the most "westernized" of the Southeast Asian countries. Thousands of men and women had been educated abroad, and Vietnam itself boasted several excellent universities. High school education was common, and even in the villages the literacy rate was high. Although the war brought political confusion, economic disruption and social unrest, the country still worked hard to improve agricultural techniques and build up the industrial sector. Strong Buddhist and Taoist traditions mixed with Western ideas and perspectives, and the social customs of the village such as arranged marriage and strong sex role difference gave way to group dating and working wives in Saigon. Nevertheless, there are some more or less pervasive cultural attitudes and values which are shared by the Vietnamese population. Many of these are based on their common history and strong national identity.

The first thousand years of this millennium were under Chinese rule, but around the tenth century the Vietnamese became independent and began to expand their territory. Of course, much of this expansion was into lands inhabited by the ancestors of present day Lao and Cambodians, hence the long-standing enmity between these peoples. The country was torn by internal political strife in the 17th Century but an uneasy truce was declared in 1673. The country was divided roughly along the 17th parallel with the Trinh family ruling in the north and the Nguyen family in control of the south. Exactly one hundred years later, in 1773, three brothers from Tay Son village in central Vietnam rose against Nguyen rule, and after defeating the Nguyen family in 1778 went North to defeat the Trinh eight years later. But the rule of the Tay Son brothers lasted just twenty five years until Nguyen Anh, a descendent of the Nguyen rulers, defeated them and founded the Nguyen dynasty which ruled until 1945.

The Nguyen dynasty marked the beginning of the Vietnamese involvement with the West, especially France. Nguyen Anh owed his life as a young man to a French priest. Therefore, although ambivalent about the French, Nguyen Anh accepted their assistance. His successor, however, did not, and carried on constant resistance against French encroachments. In the middle of the 1800s

the Nguyen dynasty attempted to eradicate Christianity and drove many Vietnamese Christians underground, killing others and burning their lands. It was the murder of a French missionary which provided the pretext for colonization. The war against France ended in defeat in 1884. It may have been this French control which most contributed to the political consciousness of the Vietnamese and the reawakening of nationalism.

Revolutionary groups, including that of Ho Chi Minh, began to form early in this century. As the French tried to suppress the rising nationalism, more and more of the groups fell under communist domination. The Second World War further loosened French control; although after the war various concessions and maneuvers resulted in a French return, Emperor Bao Dai nevertheless handed over the imperial seal to Ho Chi Minh who declared independence in September 1946. Negotiations with the French to implement this independence failed, and the French-Indochina War (1946-54) began. It ended in 1954 at the heroic battle of Dien Bien Phu, after eight years of enormous casualties (nearly 250,000 Vietnamese and nearly 90,000 French). The 1954 Geneva accord divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel, placing the North under Ho Chi Minh and the South under ex-emperor Bao Dai, who eventually lost control to his prime minister Ngo Dinh Diem in a referendum called by the latter. In October 1955 the South was declared the Republic of Vietnam.

Post-1955 history is well known to most Americans. President Ngo Dinh Diem ruled South Vietnam until 1963, during which time there was a full-fledged guerrilla war being waged with the North. Until 1975 successive military regimes held power as the United States continued to provide massive aid against the Northern guerrillas. Corruption was a constant problem and the political unrest fueled Viet Cong efforts. Finally, after persistent peace talks and negotiations, the United States agreed to withdraw its troops in the spring of 1975. In April, surrender to the approaching Northern forces seemed the only reasonable approach to the Southern leaders, and Saigon fell on April 27th. There was a massive evacuation of vulnerable people -- the first of the Indochinese refugees.

Historically, therefore, the Vietnamese share a culture more Chinese than Indian, and thus are somewhat less similar to Cambodians and Laotians. Vietnamese have a strong sense of national identity which includes pride in their long history of autonomy, their excellent art and literature, and their ability to glean from the Chinese what was most valuable.

Most Vietnamese are at least nominally Buddhist. Buddhism stresses harmony, and nonintervention, and discourages overinvolvement in the hassles of daily life. The Chinese-style Mahayana Buddhism of Vietnam puts less emphasis on the accumulation of good deeds and merit and more on a philosophically correct life to bring peace and contentment. Following the eight-fold path will help the person avoid earthly attachments, which are the root of desire and inevitable unhappiness.

There is also a very strong animist tradition in Vietnam, and a corresponding belief in ghosts, spirits, and sorcery. Some of these beliefs offer suggestions for the cause of illness or bad fortune, if not directly related to the past lives of oneself or one's relatives. Most Vietnamese, like other Southeast Asians, are superstitious, yet somewhat reluctant to admit it. For instance, cats are considered unlucky, fortune-telling is very

popular and sometimes forms the basis for major decisions, and the rituals surrounding the erection of a building, moving one's residence, or the burial of a relative are complex but critical to the continuance of good fortune. Many Vietnamese were amazed to learn of the existence of fortunetellers and ESP types in this "modern" country.

On the other hand, a strong rational tradition exists in the form of Confucianism. Confucianism stresses the importance of correct social comportment and political relationships. Ideals based on ancient models and traditions form the core of good government and a peaceful society; these ideals are reflected in ceremonies and rituals. It is possible to trace to Confucianism the existence of many formal social customs, attitudes toward filial piety and respect between certain classes of individuals, and a veneration of education and study. Vietnamese culture also includes an important Taoist element which teaches harmony and unity, and encourages simplicity, adaptability, nonconfrontation and "bending with the bamboo" in order to succeed. Because of the Taoist belief in the ultimate unity of all things, Vietnamese tend to be inclusive philosophically, recognizing the relativity of values and preferring the 'trung dung' or middle path to avoid excesses.

Another important aspect of Vietnamese life is their strong sense of family and homeland. The extended family is a source of great pride and security. Mutual care and concern run deep between parents and children, and sometimes extend to distant relatives. A strong tradition of ancestor veneration exists, and sometimes the ancestors are consulted through prayer or rituals. By 'homeland' one means the local areas from which the family comes in Vietnam, for the home site and grave area are important aspects of the sense of family continuity. The great effort, emotional and physical, which the first group of refugees have put into helping their families escape and locating even very distant relatives in the camps has been surprising even to some of the social workers involved in resettlement. Of course, such a tradition of family closeness and mutual obligation also creates its own stresses and strains; sometimes keeping things going smoothly among so many different people takes considerable effort and tact.

There is a strong sense of propriety among the Vietnamese. The concept of "face" is associated with this emphasis on decorum, formality and circumspect communication styles. The Vietnamese are not overly concerned about their own "face" when confronted with practical necessity, but are very conscious about embarrassing others. Strict social rituals, class hierarchies and proscribed modes of interaction between inferiors and superiors help to minimize uncomfortable mistakes. Many Americans find Vietnamese conversation somewhat obtuse and full of hidden meanings which are difficult to grasp, while Vietnamese find Americans impolite and blunt, insensitive to the feelings of others. Because a proper Vietnamese should be unruffled and unemotional in public, the fine art of detecting actual feelings and preferences in ostensibly neutral situations is well developed. This is sometimes referred to as the 'heart-oriented culture' of the Vietnamese, while Americans are said to have a 'mind-oriented culture'. Vietnamese do appreciate sentimentality, and thus a little "lamenting" is often an appropriate Vietnamese behavioral response where Americans would want to "get on with life".

The Vietnamese have done rather well in the United States. Known for perseverence or "doing things the hard way when the hard way is the only possibility" ('tanh can cu'), many Vietnamese have already made tremendous strides in economic and social adjustment. Others, however, sensing that their fate may be the result of the accumulated sins of ancestors, are fatalistic and less active. Cultural conflicts are most obvious at the family level, perhaps because the Vietnamese are more likely to attempt acculturation than some of the other groups. As the children become Americanized and the wives seek employment, there is the inevitable clash between the old and the new. However, because of their numbers and the establishment of small Vietnamese communities in the urban centers around the country, they will probably develop the social and educational support to deal with these changes.

The Ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asia

The Chinese comprised a large minority in Vietnam and a sizeable one in Laos and Cambodia. Economically, their influence was particularly great, for they controlled much of the commercial and industrial enterprise in the region. Basically, the ethnic Chinese could be divided into three groups according to their date of arrival and their subsequent acculturation to their country of residence. The 'Minh Huong' as they were known in Vietnamese, or the people of the Ming, migrated from the south of China during and after the Ming Dynasty in China and are now part of the national population. In Vietnam, for instance, only their names -- names such as Tran, Lam, Ly, Ngo -- remind them of their origin hundreds of years ago. A second group of Chinese came around the turn of the Century at the fall of the Ch'ing dynasty; these people came mostly from parts of Canton Province, where they spoke Cantonese along with local dialects such as Hai-nam, Hakka, and Tiu Chau, or from Fukien Province. These people account for most of the ethnic Chinese refugees: second and third generation Chinese who have not broken their emotional tie with China and felt their loyalty was to their homes and businesses rather than to South Vietnam proper. Finally, there is a smaller but significant group of Chinese who arrived since 1949 and generally lived in the Chinese areas along with the Ch'ing descendents. These latter Chinese felt a political loyalty to the government on Taiwan rather than to Mao, and probably helped to sway the entire Chinese population toward a general anti-communism.

Although there were Chinese in all southern provinces of Vietnam (as well as many in the North), the majority of them lived in Cholon, the Mandarin twin city of Saigon. Most were in fact engaged in commerce: factories, movie theaters, restaurants, tiny food stands and other establishments. Because most businesses were family-owned and staffed by family members, very few of the Chinese refugees have technical or industrial skills which would serve them well in the United States. While there was some social discrimination and stereotyping between the Vietnamese and the ethnic Chinese, there was also considerable interaction and many Chinese men took Vietnamese wives. Interestingly enough, Chinese women seldom married Vietnamese. The Chinese children attended Chinese schools where Mandarin was the medium of instruction prior to 1963, but after the rise of President Diem the Chinese schools were limited to twelve hours of Chinese instruction per week. Most people spoke their local dialect at home, Cantonese for social affairs, Mandarin for educational or formal purposes, and Vietnamese -- to some degree at least -- when out of Cholon. Of course, Chinese who lived in the provinces spoke Vietnamese most of the time.

The political position of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia has always been rather ambivalent and ill defined. In Cambodia many became Khmer citizens in order to facilitate their business concerns, but in Vietnam that was not originally an option, except of course for those people born in the country. In 1968, however, Diem decreed that in order to own businesses or land it was necessary to become a Vietnamese citizen. Perhaps because it was put in such a negative mode, most of the Chinese strongly resented the move, emphasizing their ties to Taiwan and their Chinese nationality. Nevertheless, citizens they all became. This did little, of course, to convince the apolitical ethnic Chinese to more actively support the Southern regime, and although many fought and died in the South Vietnamese Armed Forces, they did so unwillingly. Most of the Chinese believed that regardless of who was in

power, if they minded their own business, they would be left alone. They also felt that with American support, the South was ultimately in little danger.

Before the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Viet Cong made it known in Cholon that they would respect the rights and relative independence of the ethnic Chinese businessmen. Believing in their own economic strength and value to the country, the Chinese were taken by surprise when the policies of the communist government surfaced as the complete opposite. All the Chinese schools were closed and the Chinese language newpapers were banned. Everyone was required to attend nightly meetings, at which people were urged to show their loyalty to the new government and atone for the "blood money" profits of their corrupt past. At first, former owners were kept on as managers, but soon they were asked to move all relatives into one house or one floor so that Northern Vietnamese could move into Cholon. The next step was the fear of constant arrest, and finally the "request" to migrate to the new economic zones to start a new life for the sake of their political souls and the good of the country. Many Chinese strongly believed that this plan was the first step in genocide against the Ethnic Chinese, and returning individuals who escaped from some of the new economic zones, with their stories of enough rice for thirty days and then nothing, did little to dissuade the fearful Chinese. By late 1978 many families had made the decision to escape; the homes and businesses, and lives built over several generations had already been destroyed and there seemed to be little to stay for except possible starvation and definite slave-like labor in desolate areas under the careful watch of North Vietnamese cadres.

The Vietnamese government did little to stem the increasing numbers of "boat people" who pushed off from South Vietnam's shores in 1979, and there is some indication that it actively encouraged the emigration of the ethnic Chinese. The North, perhaps because of their proximity to Mainland China, had always been more wary of the Chinese than the South; the Vietnamese Chinese themselves talk about the friendliness of the Southerners and the distrust of the Northerners.

The Vietnamese Chinese have met several unique adjustment problems in this country. The first was the realization that Chinese-Americans are much less like themselves than they are like Anglo-Americans. In fact, there is very little difference between the culture of the Vietnamese and the Chinese-Vietnamese, but a great gap between the westernized Chinese living in an American Chinatown and the refugee from Cholon. The Chinese-American sees less an ethnic brother than a refugee from an underdeveloped country, with all the connotations about sophistication, education and class that such a view assumes. This is, of course, highly resented by the Southeast Asian Chinese who sees himself as the former economic fulcrum of Indochina and is sometimes guilty of considerable nationalistic (ethnic) pride.

The second major problem has been psychological. Most of the Chinese refugees have an incredibly personal pride and sense of responsibility toward their ancestors and about the shops, businesses, or position which the family finally acquired after several generations of hard work. Their sense of loss is articulated in terms of "everything we have worked for since my grandfather's time" or "five generations of work" -- a kind of nullification of the lives of beloved fathers and relatives. The middle-aged Chinese especially have experienced a deep sense of depression and meaninglessness; they have little hope of building a new life in this country and even question the meaningfulness of making an effort.

VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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0. INTRODUCTION

> "It is obvious even to the most casual observer of world events that the refugee problem is more critical than at any time since World War II... The number of refugees has grown simultaneously and dramatically on every continent...(and) refugee problems have become a regular feature of our world."
>
> -Dick Clark
> Statement of I.C.E.M., Geneva 5/21/79

> "As many as 2.2 million ethnic Chinese, former U.S. supporters and 'disaffected Viet Cong' still seek to leave Vietnam..."
>
> -Report of a Congressional Delegation
> The Washington Post, 8/12/79

> "...there seemed to be ample evidence to support estimates that starvation is threatening as many as 2.25 million Cambodians. The figures were given recently by a team from the United Nations Children's Fund and Red Cross..."
>
> -New York Times, 8/11/79

The massive and controversial movement of Indochinese refugees in recent years raises formidable pragmatic and ethical policy issues. Thousands of people have been condemned to death at sea by refusal of aid or sanctuary. Other tens of thousands languish in camps today. Assumptions about refugees, often implicit, generate attitudes which become uncritically translated into public policy and personal behavior. Meaningful debate of the morality and practicality of policy positions and individual attitudes requires better understanding of the refugee experience, behavior and communicative styles.

> "The refugees have one important thing going for them: their predecessors, who fled Viet Nam after the fall of Saigon in 1975, have adjusted well to life in Western Europe and the U.S. Though there have been traces of resentment against them, as there have been against immigrants of the past, the Vietnamese as a group have shown themselves to be hardworking and proudly self-sufficient. According to a new study by the University of Maryland, the Vietnamese employment rate in the U.S. is higher than that of the American population as a whole, and the number of Vietnamese refugees on welfare has steadily declined. According to the study 71% of the families now have incomes of at least $800 a month."
>
> -Time, 7/9/79

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When the refugees from Indochina first came in 1975, the U.S. Government was more concerned about self-sufficiency and employment of these people than about their cross-cultural adjustment and communication. Federally funded programs under Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program (IRAP) since then stressed vocational training of household heads and almost totally ignored cross-cultural adjustment and communication needs. As recently as on September 19, 1979, the House Judiciary Committee of the United States Congress, while approving the creation of an office in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to administer a permanent program for resettling refugees admitted to the United States, passed a bill which would have the HEW office administer a program of language and job training that could serve prospective refugees waiting in overseas camps, thus easing the process of resettlement.

"For the first time we have a comprehensive resettlement program."

-Rep. Elizabeth Holzman, D-NY
Chair, House Immigration and
Refugee Subcommittee

Meantime,

"Shortly after 6 a.m. last Tuesday, World Airways Flight 031 touched down at California's Travis Air Force Base. A scream of 396 Indochinese refugees began to struggle down the stairway with their makeshift shopping-bag luggage, pausing at the bottom to fold their hands and bow formally to the flight attendants... They had journeyed several centuries in 19 hours, and the shock would be a long time wearing off...

Despite the aid, refugees are discovering that assimilation is far from automatic. There are the usual problems of language and loneliness...

But far worse in the long run may be American resentment. Although a recent Gallup poll found that 57% of those questioned said that refugees would be welcome in their communities, a call-in poll sponsored by the San Francisco Chronicle found that 73% of 24,0000 phoners opposed the influx of boat people.

In a few cases, suspicion has already turned to hostility. In Denver, 18 refugee families fled from their dilapidated housing project two weeks ago after a brick-and-bottle battle between the Vietnamese and their Chicano neighbors...

The worse incident so far occurred last month in Seadrift, Texas (pop. 1,000)...

On Aug. 3, Billy Joe Aplin, 35, a local fisherman, was shot and killed in an argument on a pier; two Vietnamese brothers were indicted. That night three of the refugees' boats were burned and a home was fire bombed. Most of them fled...

Ironically, many refugees have aroused indignation for working too hard, not too little..."

-Time, 9/10/79

The so-called "comprehensive resettlement program" approved by the United States Congress on September 19, 1979 emphasized language and job training, and did not mention education in cross-cultural adjustment and communication despite the hard facts in the news that seem to advocate a reverse order of priority. The aim of this paper is, then, to make an attempt to point out the pitfalls in Vietnamese-American cross-cultural communication while presenting an eclectic analysis of the communicative style of the Vietnamese people. It will do so by reviewing the circumstances under which the Vietnamese came to the United States and the rest of the Western world, the effects of their traditions on their communicative behavior, the cultural background of their societal transactions, and the psycho-religious forces that dictate their way of life, thinking, and thought expression. It is also the goal of this paper to advocate more research on cross-cultural communication between refugees and their hosting communities, a problem that involves all continents and tens of millions of people if not the entire human race.

1. VIETNAMESE EXODUS 1975-80: IMPACT ON CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Since the Second World War, there has been continual warfare in Vietnam. The Japanese occupied the country from 1940-1945, and at their surrender, the French returned. During that time, a resistance movement spread out in the country, and defeated the French colonial forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1945. Vietnam was then divided into two countries. In the South, the Republic of Vietnam came under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem from 1955 to 1963. The country enjoyed a relative peace until 1960 when the National Liberation Front began to wage guerilla warfare. From the time of the formation of the Republic of Vietnam, the United States sent advisors but American involvement was intensified as the war increased in magnitude until 1973 when the U.S. forces began to withdraw. In view of the worsened military situation, the crumbling economy since the withdrawal of U.S. support, and the low morale among the troups, Duong Van Minh, succeeding Nguyen Van Thieu, surrendered to the advance of the North Vietnamese forces on April 29, 1975. With the sudden fall of South Vietnam, some 125,000 Vietnamese were hurriedly evacuated to Wake Island, Guam and the Philippines. The first groups left by airplane straight from Tan Son Nhut Airport, the last ones by helicopters or small boats from Saigon and then by ships from the high seas off the coast of Vung Tau. From the Pacific Islands, the people were sent to refugee camps in California, Arkansas, Florida, Pennsylvania, and to third countries such as France, Canada, and Australia.

A high percentage of the evacuees in April 1975 was composed of the people who had been affiliated with the former South Vietnamese or the Americans. Most of them lived in urban areas, chiefly Saigon. However, they could retrace their rural origin either as first or second generation urban settlers. Many of them were among the million people who fled the North in 1954 when the Communists took over. Although they had lived in cities, deep in their hearts the evacuees still felt a very strong attachment to their native village and their ancestors' tombs. Unlike the other groups who came to the United States and other Western countries, these refugees were engaged in forced migration. They had no choice but to flee and they had no time to prepare themselves emotionally for the separation, culture shock, and cross-culturally communicative maze involved.

Life in camps in Wake Island, Guam, the Philippines, and in the United States was hard and full of uncertainties. Everything was new and strange: the food, the camp life, the lack of medical assistance, the search for sponsors, the burning heat and the chilling cold, the communicative gap between camp authorities and the refugees. The camp authorities wanted to move the refugees as soon as possible, but sponsors were scattered throughout the nation and the usually large families of the refugees were split up with members separated from one another by thousands of miles. This situation and the fact that over 75 percent of the refugees still had members of their immediate families in Vietnam, increased the tendency to fatalism and search for guidance in their behavior from Buddhism and Taoism, and to stay aloof and non-communicative with the outside world.

Since 1975, people have continued to flee Vietnam in unseaworthy fishing boats and rafts. It is estimated that more than half of them never make port. The more fortunate ones reach the shores of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore or the Philippines. Those who reach the Philippines are generally better treated than those who arrive in other countries where they have sometimes been chased back to open seas after being given food and water. At best they are kept in crowded refugee camps. In July 1975, President Jimmy Carter announced the acceptance of 14,000 rather than 7,000 refugees monthly, particularly those presently in camps in Southeast Asia. Other countries such as France, Canada and Australia also pledged to accept more Indochinese refugees at the International Conference on Indochinese Refugees in Geneva in July 1979. On September 19, 1979, the U.S. House Judiciary Committee approved a bill which would increase the refugee admission limit from 17,400 to 50,000 a year and authorize the President, in consultation with the House and Senate judiciary committees, to approve additional emergency admissions.

In many ways, the latest refugees are worse off than their predecessors, who came with the first wave of Indochinese refugees after South Vietnam fell. While earlier refugees often brought some money with them, most of the latest immigrants have bartered their cash for their lives and must begin penniless. According to a report by the General Accounting Office, the newcomers are generally less educated and less likely to speak English (Time, September 19, 1979).

The influx of the latest refugees, which is anticipated to be accelerating in the months ahead because of congressional and presidential actions, will likely pose grave cross-cultural communication problems considering the traditions which dictate the behavior of the Vietnamese, a matter to be discussed below.

2. VIETNAMESE TRADITIONS AND COMMUNICATIVE STYLES

It is not possible to begin an understanding of the Vietnamese communicative styles without a knowledge of what life was for these people in their homeland, both traditionally, and more recently in the conflict of the past thirty-five years.

"The Vietnamese live on rice and legends!"

-says an old proverb.

Legend has it that the race was born of the union of a Dragon King and a Fairy Queen...thus the Vietnamese are sometimes called "Sons of Dragons, grandsons of Spirits." The best scientific evidence, while inconclusive, suggests that the Vietnamese were indeed formed of a fusion of nationalities. Vietnam has been a center of meeting and amalgation for large Austro-Asiatic migrations. The two prevailing elements have been the Indonesian and Mongoloid. Almost from its birth this race of people was threatened with extinction by absorption into other civilizations, particularly the Chinese. Though willing to learn Chinese skills, customs and ideology, the Vietnamese resisted from the very beginning the great assimilative power of Chinese civilization, and a distinct Vietnamese culture was born and has survived.

For more than a century, the Vietnamese have attempted to harmonize basically rustic cultures and the materialistic civilization of the modern world. During this process, clashes between traditional values and requirements for technological modernization have occurred. It has been said that these clashes are the basis of the recent conflict in Vietnam.

Life in Vietnam is based on a 'rice culture', attuned to the rhythms of the seasons of planting and harvesting. For a thousand years, the technology of the water buffalo was stable. One's ancestors, the source of one's life, had planted and reaped on this land. Their graves stood in the rice fields and their spirits continued to watch over the family. Individual death did not mark an end. Here the past and present merged, and there existed the sense of a natural harmony between man and the land, between the living and their ancestors.

The cradle of Vietnamese society was the village. Enclosed behind a tall bamboo hedge, each village was a separate entity, complete with its own population, customs, even its own deity enshrined in the communal house, a tiny world within the world of Vietnam.

The village provided the individual Vietnamese with security in a potentially hostile environment. Within its web of social relations, one's place and duties were exactly defined even in the language itself: the use of kinship terms as personal pronouns always the social, hierarchical, or age relationship of the two interlocutors. In the past few peple left the village of their birth, for to do so was to leave one's place in the world, to lose touch with one's past and one's ancestors' interactions and to enter a moral, legal and spiritual void. Thus, communication with people from other villages let alone foreigners was either non-existent or based upon an inherent distrust. One could consider these settlements rustic but it was within the encircling hedges of the villages and the absence of communication with the outside world that the Vietnamese found the strength to carry on a covert resistance to foreign invaders and occupations, and to cultural and racial assimilation.

In Vietnam, the family, rather than the individual is the basic unit of society, and harmony in personal relationships is valued more than personal achievement and competitiveness, which are equated with selfishness. Intelligence, scholarship and, by extension, wisdom are valued more than physical prowess or bravery for its own sake. Physical beauty and grace are important attributes for both men and women, but virtue is praised most highly.

Filial devotion, brotherly love, and conjugal fidelity are highly valued. Perhaps these values are stressed because of the present difficulty, especially in the younger generation, of maintaining them in a situation of social chaos and consequent instability of all relations. Marriage was formerly arranged by the family and second wives and mistresses have been an institution reluctantly tolerated by the first wives. In contrast to China, however, Vietnamese women enjoyed a measure of influence and freedom.

In communicating with the Vietnamese, western observers have often been intrigued with their grace, charm, intelligence and apparent friendliness. They have also come to realize that the Vietnamese character is more complex than initially suspected.

Long experience with foreign domination has taught them a wariness of all strangers, never entirely nullified by the desire for friendship and mutual understanding. One must never be in a hurry to explain oneself.

The Vietnamese possess an inwardness, a well-developed ability to keep their true feelings hidden. Desires are expressed by indirection, by hinting and 'talking around' the subject. American straightforwardness is considered at best impolite, at worst brutal. In Vietnam one does not come directly to the point. To do so is, for an American, a mark of honesty and forthrightness while a Vietnamese sees it as a lack of intelligence or courtesy. Falsehood carries no moral stricture for Vietnamese. The essential question is not whether a statement is true or false, but what the intention of the statement is. Does it facilitate interpersonal harmony? Does it indicate a wish to change the subject? Hence, one must intuit the 'heart' of the speaker through his words.

In Vietnam one thinks very carefully before speaking. The American sytle of 'speaking one's mind' is thus misunderstood as meanings not present are assumed (and therefore looked for and perhaps 'found'.) On the American side, meanings present are missed...leading the Vietnamese to regard Americans as 'unintelligent'. Many westerners may view the Vietnamese as 'suspicious' or 'paranoid'. Again, in Vietnam, multiple levels of meaning and covert intentions are often present and always sought. To take a statement at its face value is, for them simply naive.

The Vietnamese have well-developed 'inner life' and much emotional and mental effort may take place in a quiet individual. Passive resistance has been developed to a fine art leading to flexibility and adaptability in the face of many years of occupation and political domination. This may be misinterpreted by some observers as indecisiveness or being 'two-faced'.

Since the ultimate goal of communication for Vietnamese is interpersonal harmony, a question can be left unanswered in a natural way. Likewise, periods of silence in a converstaion are not unusual.

Frances Fitzgerald has remarked in Fire in the Lake:

> "In order for the Americans and the Vietnamese to understand each other, each would have to recreate the world of the other entirely."

Vietnamese-American communication will be accomplished smoothly if each group is able to overcome its misconceptions of the other, and to appreciate the communicative rules of the other.

3. VIETNAMESE PSYCHO-RELIGIOUS FORCES AND CROSS CULTURAL-COMMUNICATION

Before cross-cultural communication is discussed, it is crucial to recapitulate the moral and religious universe of the Vietnamese, that is to say the psycho-religious forces that dictate the mode of living, way of thought, and manner of thought expression.

The religious universe of Vietnam is composed mainly of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, the cult of ancestors, and popular beliefs. To these elements, Christianity was added in recent history. There seems to be a perfect harmony of religions in Vietnam in that they co-exist as an amalgamous pool of wisdom guiding the behavior of every Vietnamese whether he is Buddhist, Taoist, Confucianist, or Christian.

According to Buddhism, life is a vast sea of suffering in which man wallows hopelessly. In effect, the vicious circle of existence is renewed in the course of endless reincarnations. The cause of suffering is Desire: desire for life, happiness, riches, power, and so on. If desire were suppressed, the cause of pain would be destroyed. The essence of Buddhist teaching is contained in the concept of Kharma, the law of causality: the present existence is conditioned by earlier existences, and will condition those to follow. Thus, the virtuous man should strive constantly to improve himself by doing good deeds, and by renouncing sensual pleasures, so that he can become conscious of the Buddha, who is present in every living being. Consequently, desire must be first overcome, and pure heart is necessary to break the chains binding man to his earthly existence.

The thirty five years of almost continuous warfare have greatly affected the psychology of the Vietnamese, and have strengthened their belief in the concept of the Kharma. In fact, the sudden changes during the war, the loss of property and position by many of them, the tragic deaths of their relatives and friends, the massive movements of people from one place to another, and the hasty and random departure from their native land seem to defy any logic, and seem to be explained only by fatalism, or Kharma, or some supernatural law of punishment and reward that man cannot know. This concept of Kharma explains why some Vietnamese refugees are not enthusiastic to move forward, to strive for success, or even to make the most of life. Instead, these people try to renounce earthly pleasures, and aim at religious deeds in order to get to the state of Nirvana, or bliss, after their present life. It also explains why some Vietnamese seem to be quite content with their seemingly substandard housing, modest clothes, and even jobs that have no promise of advancement.

In terms of cross-cultural communication, extra-linguistic cues such as clothing, housing, the absence of jewelry or make-up should be interpreted in the Buddhist concept of renouncement of earthly pleasures and possessions. The Kharma or law of causality should also be kept in mind when a Vietnamese suddenly stops arguing or defending his viewpoint without any apparent reason: it could be that he sees the futility of his argumentation considering the law of causality which is beyond his control.

Whereas Buddhism teaches the Vietnamese to strive for Nirvana, Confucianism, at least as it is understood by them, addresses social problems. Confucius founded his doctrine on the basis of etiology. He said that the stability of a regime depends on an ideal, and this ideal can have value only if it is based on great examples from the past.

From this concept, Confucius instituted the cult of ancestors, which places the spirits of the dead relatives in the very heart of the household. Since that time, the family has been required to respect this tradition, because no one would dare to offend or provoke the dead. In traditional Vietnam, the tombs of the ancestors are well cared for by the descendents. In order to care for their ancestors' tombs, the Vietnamese by all means try to remain in their native village generation after generation, which explains their strong attachment to their native village. In their homes, their ancestors' altars occupy the place of honor. It is in front of the ancestors' altar that cermonies such as weddings, new year's celebration, etc., are performed, and it is in front of the altar that the family (extended family) meets to make all the decisions that affect its members. Because the ancestors are ever present among their descendents, they are consulted on any major matter by prayers, and they give advice via dreams or other forms of enlightenment. Because of this, attempts to have a dialogue with the dead by a Vietnamese should not be considered an abnormal psychological sign.

The cult of ancestors, the attachment to the native site of their tombs and the 'dialogue' with them in front of their altars are missing in the United States and other western countries. This explains much of the loneliness, guilt, and incapacity felt by many a Vietnamese. He feels lonely because he cannot have communication with his ancestors; he feels incapable of making any decision because he does not receive their advice. The cult of ancestors also explains the intergenerational conflicts: parents feel that their children raised in the western environment will not worship them after their death, and will not worship their ancestors. It may also partially explain some of the marital conflicts. In traditional Vietnamese families, the wife belongs to her husband's family and helps him in his duties toward his ancestors. She will have to be dependent on her eldest son when her husband dies. The economic situation in western society often means the wife has to work outside of the family, and has no time for the traditional activities directed towards the husband's ancestors. Interpersonal communication between grandparents and grandchildren, parents and children, and husbands and wives may also be strained by the cross-cultural conflicts between the Confucian expectations of the former and the westernized liberal views of the latter.

Another concept of Confucius that influences the behavior of the Vietnamese in general and their communicative style in particular is the innate goodness of man. Man is inherently good, and in order to preserve this quality, it is only necessary to keep passions in check. If men do not live to their potential goodness, it is because they neglect their intellect, which atrophies in the hum-drum routine of everyday life. The wise man, in contrast to the ordinary many, improves himself through study. He knows himself, and is master of his passions. For this, he will be honored by his heirs, and his soul will have peace in the hereafter. In sum, those who are good are rewarded and those who do evil must suffer the consequences.

The Vietnamese, imbued with the Confucian ideas of the innate goodness of man and self improvement through study, appreciate education and tend to show that they are educated by quoting sayings, proverbs, and particularly Confucius's words. Their speech may then sound pompous and affected. Even when they speak English, this tendency to refer to quotations can often be noticed.

Another concept of Confucianism that has been integrated in the normative behavior of the Vietnamese pertains to social relations. Confucianism is a doctrine of social hierarchies, whose effectiveness has been demonstrated by history; the status quo was maintained by the application of this doctrine rather than by the use of force. Confucianism defines, by rigid rules, the attitudes which each member of the society should have and prescribes the formula for three all-important sets of social interaction, called "Tam Cuong'. These interactions are between ruler and subject, between father and son, and between husband and wife. It also dictates a moral code for the man of virtue who should be a living example of the five cardinal virtues: humanity, equity, urbanity, intelligence and honesty. The man of virtue should also follow a path of moderation: exaggeration in any direction is to be avoided, and equanimity is to be cultivated. This moral perfection may be progressively attained by going through four steps: the improvement of oneself, the management of the family, the government of the country, and finally, the pacification of the world.

The first set of social interactions, namely between ruler and subject, explains the success or failure in the relationship between the Vietnamese worker (in the role of a subject) and his employer (in the role of a ruler), as well as in the relationship between the refugee himself and his sponsor.

The Vietnamese employee considers his employer as his mentor. As such, the latter is expected to give guidance, advice, and encouragement, and the former is supposed to execute orders, to perform his task quietly, and not to ask questions or have doubts about the orders. Because of his concept of the relationship, the Vietnamese employee does not voice his opinion to his boss, but just listens to his orders. This seemingly passive and unimaginative attitude is aggravated by a linguistic difference between Vietnamese and English. The Vietnamese literal equivalent of the English word "Yes" is "Da" (pronounced /ya/ in the Southern Vietnamese dialect). However, whereas the English "Yes" means unequivocally "Yes", the Vietnamese "Da" means a variety of things. In the final analysis, it can mean "Yes", but in general usage it merely means "I am politely listening to you", and it does not at all mean that "I agree with you". The listener may disagree with what he hears, but due to his politeness and deference to his boss (or his sponsor), cannot say no. His English "Yes", for him conveys the polite and non-committal Vietnamese "Da", but to the American it can carry only its English meaning. Thus, the Vietnamese may appear insincere, or even stupid to the American.

Another factor that can contribute to strain and misunderstanding between the Vietnamese and the American is the enigmatic Vietnamese smile. The Vietnamese smiles when politeness prevents him from contradicting his interlocutor. He also smiles when he does not completely understand what is said to him and yet, also out of politeness, does not want to ask for clarification.

At the same time, the Vietnamese expects his employer to be paternalistic, kind, and soft-spoken. The latter's direct and straight-forward speech sounds rude to him. And because he is not supposed to retort or talk back, the only

alternative for him is to try to swallow his frustration until he cannot bear it any more. At that time, his last recourse is to resign and to look for another boss who would be more understandable and kind by Vietnamese standards. This problem of communication is aggravated by the fact that, being in a strange environment and new job and in most cases not speaking English well enough to express his thoughts, the Vietnamese may likely misunderstand his American boss and in turn, be misunderstood by him.

The second set of social interactions in Confucianism, that between father and son, is governed by the rule of total obedience of the son to the father. Owing his life and everything else to his father, the child is supposed to venerate him, to do whatever is asked of him, and to continue his father's task in the cult of ancestors. The rule of order may create conflict between the father and his sons and daughters in this country. The father adapts more slowly, if at all, to the American culture where his relationship to his children is less formal and restrictive than what he is used to. He expects them to conform to the Confucian order just as he himself did in his relationship to his own father. But the children are socialized by their own age group here and tend to act in the American way. Also in most cases, if not all, the children speak English better than their father. The father resents the reversal of roles, his children feel it, and the situation could explode into an open confrontation between the two. Or, the children may conform to the traditional norm of relationship with their father. In that case, their different behavior may cause a strain with their peer group.

The third set of social interactions, that between husband and wife, is based upon the idea that the woman should in all circumstances conform to the three obediences: obedience to her father until she is married, obedience to her husband after she leaves her father's house, and obedience to her eldest son, should she be widowed. Further, the model wife should possess the four essential virtues: skill with her hands, pleasant appearance, prudence in her speech, and exemplary conduct.

It is quite apparent that the role of the traditional Vietnamese woman and her relationship to her husband according to the Confucian norm may clash with the reality of the American environment. In most cases, the husband's salary alone is not sufficient to meet the high cost of living in the United States. The wife then has to work to supplement the family's income and often is able to get a more lucrative job than her husband's. Furthermore, nature seems to favor women in second language learning and the wife makes better progress in speaking English. Again, there is a role reversal. The husband feels, either consciously or unconsciously, threatened. On the other hand, the wife, because of her work and interaction with the outside world, does not have enough time to perform her traditional role in the family. Being exposed for the first time to the "Women's Liberation Movement' -- freedom, self-sufficiency, and equality -- the Vietnamese woman may react more strongly against the traditional role than her American counterpart. This conflict between her husband's conservative expectations and the role of women in American society may cause marital problems as seen in a growing number of divorces. In the past the expectation of the four traditional virtues limited the education of the Vietnamese woman to the high school diploma in the majority of cases. In Hawaii particularly where the job market is tight, openings for the Vietnamese woman often are found in jobs related to the tourist industry and often require them to work at night. These jobs are distasteful and arouse the suspicions of her husband. This may be another source of marital conflict.

In his relationship with a Vietnamese couple, the American man should always bear in mind the above Confucian set of social interactions between husband and wife. Whether he is a counselor, social worker, doctor, or salesman, the Confucian etiquette requires that he talk to the husband first before talking to the wife. Even while he is talking to the wife, he should always make the husband feel that he is the head of his family. His sitting arrrangement vis-a-vis the two of them should also reflect this male preponderence: the husband should be in front of, and closer to him that the wife.

Age is another dimension in Confucian hierarchical order. In his communication with Vietnamese elders, the American should always show them his respect both linguistically and extra-linguistically. The rule requires that he sit still in front of elderly people, his eyes are directed downwards and not straight to his interlocutors, and his feet should be flat on the ground and not crossed. Gesticulation is considered to be bad manners.

Another cultural force dictating the conduct of the Vietnamese, no less important than Buddhism and Confucianism, is Taoism. Vietnamese Taoism is derived from the doctrine of Lao Tsu, which is based essentially on the participation of the two elements Yin (negative) and Yang (positive), which represents the constant duality of nature: rest and motion, liquid and solid, light and darkness, contraction and expansion, material and spiritual. The material world being imbued with these two principles, the Taoist believes that whoever is able to act according to these two principles could become the master of the world. This belief, in turn, has promoted a certain mysticism reflected in magical practices of certain sorcerers who pretend to possess the secrets of the universe. The Taoist refrains from disturbing the Natural Order; on the contrary, he conforms to it in every circumstance. He considers the taking of initiatives to be vain; thus, he disdains the active life, which is the basis for the Taoist doctrine of passivity and absence of care. These doctrines are summed up in the Taoist maxim "Do nothing and everything will be accomplished spontaneously."

Whereas Buddhism teaches the Vietnamese to seek happiness after life in the form of Nirvana free from the vicious circle of life and death, Confucianism and Taoism both teach him to seek happiness in his present life. The former essentially recommends dynamism, activity, and advancement by means of improving himself; the latter essentially advocates inertia, blending himself with nature, and to be in harmony with himself, his fellowmen, and the universe. Thus, one could picture the Buddhist way toward happiness in Nirvana as a direction vertically upward, the Confucian trajectory toward happiness as a horizontal arrow forward, and the Taoist road toward happiness as a horizontal arrow but directly opposite that of the Confucian one. From this picture, it is possible to see how the Taoist influence suggests a neglect of material possessions, success, power, and activities. It directs the Vietnamese to look for pleasure and contentment in nature, quietness, and a peaceful worriless mind. Especially when faced with apparently unsurmountable difficulties such as those of a refugee, he may adopt a defeatist attitude toward the outside world in general, and toward communication with his fellowmen in particular.

In comparison with the other religions, Christianity was introduced to Vietnam relatively recently. It was not until the 16th century that Christian missionaries began preaching the Gospel in Vietnam. As was said earlier in this paper, whether a Vietnamese is Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian or Christian,

the teachings of Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tsu constitute a source of wisdom which dictate his behavior in general and his communicative style in particular. Added to these religious forces, his native geographic and historical conditions also play an important role in his world view.

Despite more recent moves to the cities, the Vietnamese kept their roots in the villages where agriculture prevailed and dictated the mode of life. For this reason, the Vietnamese peasants face natural catastrophies stoically. Intelligent in their daily work, knowing how to cope with inevitable disasters, they were truly Pascal's "thinking reeds" which bend but do not break under strong winds. This flexibility when faced with difficulties has helped the Vietnamese endure the long years of war and the trauma of their exodus and resettlement. It is hoped that it will help them in their cross-cultural communication with their hosting community, a matter which is likely hindered by their nostalgia, loneliness, and even lack of stamina due to their attachment to their native land.

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HEALTH AND DISEASE:

THE INDOCHINESE PERSPECTIVE

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A very peculiar experience, common to health planners and administrators in most developing countries, is the under-utilization of their health facilities. While the population is visited upon by every possible scourge coming from poverty and ignorance, the health service network, set up at the cost of many sacrifices, somehow never renders the full extent of the services. Most hospitals are full but other facilities, especially in the rural areas, function at only part of their potential; in fact, half of their work consists of convincing people to use their services. In the meantime, the pharmacies do a brisk business, and all the traditional healers and their western-style counterparts in private practice are swarmed with patients and everybody complains that there are not enough physicians. Bureaucracy, insensitivity, in addition to the derogatory "charity" label, undoubtedly account for a great part of the bad reputation of the public medical facilities. However, the situation is still paradoxical; patients experience a scarcity of health services in the midst of abundance of health facilities.

In essence, this is the situation we have on our hands with the Indochinese refugee mental health problems. Community resources in mental health may not be always accessible, but they are available, and they give reasonably good quality services. And yet, somehow, they rarely see the Indochinese patients they are supposed to see, and the patients themselves, crying for help, rarely receive the help they need.

Graphically, the logical sequence of health care delivery starts with a problem, which, if perceived as a need, will create a demand, which in turn will be responded to by an appropriate service. A smooth operation is assured only if there is a concordance at each of these steps. A missing link, or more often, a mismatch of these elements results in the breakdown of the system. This may happen, for example, when there is a problem which is not perceived as a need because the patient does not see himself as sick or disturbed, such as the case of a refugee who acts out his frustration and his resentment by tyrannizing his wife and his children and is astounded when an outsider intervenes. Or the demand does not exist although there is a need: a refugee feels lonely and sad but sees no reason for asking a mental health professional to help. Or the service does not exist or at least is not considered as appropriate or desirable by the client and the result is much the same as if no service is available. An Indochinese struggling with problems of adjustment needs some help but sees no benefit that could be derived from counseling or similar services because he could not relate these to his needs.

This oversimplified view of the problem of health planning: i.e. how to match the services to the needs and the demands, at least serves to underscore an often-forgotten truth: health services are for people, not for diseases. It also hammered in the fact that we can only help insasmuch as people perceive a need for help, request the help and accept the services that we offer because these match with their expectations.

At all stages, the perception of need, demand and services, is subjective, conditioned by two major determinants: culture and education. Education provides a handle to modify the effects of culture, but never completely erases its impact, as people tend to go along with the socio-cultural traditions of the group and refer to a common stock of traditions, conventions and experiences to decide on what it is like to be in good health, why and when a person is sick, what to do, and how, when one is sick... Individual factors also intervene to color or change part of these views, but the concepts of health, disease, medicine, sick role... are usually shared with a larger group, in the context of a general cultural system, in the framework of common values, assumptions and beliefs.

As a way to understand our prospective Indochinese clients' behavior in a therapeutic setting, it is therefore necessary to briefly present their ideas on health, disease, medicine and medical practice and to review the main issues of mental disease from an Indochinese perspective. The hope is that the discussion may offer a few hints and clues to help predict their reaction to what is being offered in our service organization and select the ways we may eventually go in order to meet their perceived needs and demands.

DISEASE

Most people would be really hard-pressed to explain what they mean by "health" but will elaborate more readily on what makes them ill. Indochinese are no exception to the rule, and if we were to ask Vietnamese, for example, there would rarely be any hesitation in naming what they think was the cause of their disease. The list is long and varied, but as a rule, the presumed causal determinants can be divided into three main categories: physical agents, supernatural elements, and metaphysical factors, acting separately or all at the same time.

Physical agents are concrete, easy-to-understand, "natural" elements and forces which impinge upon the body by infraction or bring about harmful changes by their presence, all in an obvious fashion. Such is the case of a knife slashing skin and muscles, or rottten food causing stomach distress. In this context, the modern germ theory has had no difficulty in getting accepted in modern Asia, though people may not always draw the necessary conclusions, for example about the prevention of disease.

Supernatural causes are less often evoked nowadays, as people are more conversant with the natural sciences; they still lurk in the back of many minds when the symptoms are obscure and incomprehensible and no simple direct causal explanation is evident and available, such as in most mental disorders. The origin of disease then, is ascribed to the action of supra-natural powers intervening after a fault, a violation of religion or ethical codes, or simply an accident which caused displeasure to some deity who expressed his anger by striking the hapless mortal. In more of a diffuse way, most Vietnamese, even when professing Christianity or Buddhism, continue to harbor mystical beliefs which make them wonder about what they have done to deserve their fate, i.e., to be sick and to suffer. (May we mention that things are not so different in modern-day America, except that God or sin are invoked instead of demon or fate).

The most original scheme of explanation of diseases, however, combines realistic elements with metaphysical considerations. In this perspective, essentially East Oriental, health is but a facet of life in the universe which is said to function under the terms of a unified, comprehensive scheme. In tune with nature, the human body operates with the assumptions of a delicate balance between two basic opposite elements Am (Yin) and Duong (Yang), or Male and Female, or Light and Darkness. In medicine, the two poles become Hot and Cold, and health is the perfect equilibrium of hot and cold elements resulting from the harmonious functioning of the viscera. Any excess in either direction leading to dis-equilibrium means a deranged physiology, discomfort and illness. Hence, the golden rule in medicine which consists of juggling the hot and cold qualities of drugs, foods and other natural elements, to fit the hot and cold status of the body organs so that one may retain or regain the vital balance. Certain diseases are said to be due to an excess of the cold element, such as diarrhea, attributed to a cold stomach. Others are ascribed to an imbalance toward the hot pole: pimples, pustules come from an excessive hot which erupts through the skin.

Among foods, most vegetables are cold, sweets and candies are hot; tangerines are hot, while tea is cold and coffee is hot; bananas are cold and mangoes are hot. Drugs and medicinal herbs are also carefully classified according to their properties along a scale of hot and cold effects. As a rule, Western medicines are all hot, and herb medicines in general possess more cooling properties. Therefore, there is a very cautious view of Western medicines, as they may not be suitable to an Oriental constitution. This often, practically, results in some hesitancy from the Vietnamese patient about taking the medicine prescribed by an American doctor; and in some cases, a surreptitious reduction in the dosage, again for fear that American medicines may be more than a Vietnamese could handle at the standard American dosage.

Besides the hot and cold system, clearly derived from a Chinese model, the Vietnamese goes about explaining his ailments with an original theory of body humours, the principal protagonist of which is named "phong" meaning wind, which serves to indicate either the causal factor of an extremely acute disease or a pathological condition characterized by a skin eruption. A stroke, a seizure are "phong", but so is a common cold. Hives and leprosy are also varieties of "phong". Certain foods, especially certain meats are said to carry the "phong' effect and as such, are looked upon with suspicion. Beef had this kind of reputation, but buffalo meat is worse, as well as certain sea foods, while pork and chicken are considered benign.

MEDICINE AND PHYSICIANS

In such a context, when an illness appears to stem from the complex interaction of multiple factors, medicine also becomes multi-dimensional and involves a body of empirical knowledge, combined with mystical beliefs and metaphysical postulates. The physician, partaking of his many functions, is cast in the role of a man of science and experience, a depository of wisdom at the same time that he is endowed with extraordinary, if not magical, powers. As an example, he may arrive at his diagnosis after threading his way through the mysterious paths of a system known only to himself and his disciples. The patient needs not tell him the symptoms he came in for as the doctor should be able to call the name of the game right away, at first sight. A physical examination is not necessary: only the delicate palpation of the radial pulse

at the wrist will tell it all. As a remnant of this tradition, one still witnesses sometimes a mild reluctance to detailed history-taking and an occasional provocative reply: "Why do you have to ask?" You are a doctor, you should be able to tell me what I have." As a consequence, there exists also a real resistance to disrobing, which the patient prefers to do by small segments, one at a time.

The ingredients used in the treatment also participate in this mystical atmosphere and gain more reputable power, the rarer or more extravagant or exotic they are. Extraordinary cures for the most severe illnesses are expected to come from the use of monkey's brain, tiger's bones, rhinoceros's horn, goat's testes, bear's gall-bladder...

The man-in-the-street's answer to minor ailments is somewhat simpler, but still in line with the traditional conceptual model of disease. For example, most Asians never fail to keep in their medicine cabinet or to carry in their purse a vial of some oil or ointment, the names of which are really household by-words: Nhi Thien Duong, Tiger's balm, Burma's Cula... The cure-all medicine can be rubbed under the nose, on the temples, on the belly, or even taken by mouth. It is said to help combat a cold, to calm an indigestion or generally to deter any kind of "phong" malady. The popularity of this Asian version of the snake oil has not decreased at all after the expatriation, and the Asian food stores still do a good business selling different brands of these nostrums.

As medicine mainly deals with invisible fluids and immaterial elements, there is rarely an indication for invasive techniques and surgery. Traumatic lesions are expected to heal as the result of an adjustment of the body internal economy, not of manual intervention. Hence, there is a great resistance to any suggestion of surgery along with a great fear of mutilation.

The closest a Vietnamese would come to a manual medical procedure is through "rubbing out the wind", the rationale of which resides with the "phong" theory. The procedure consists in a forceful and insistent rubbing of specific areas of the forehead, the root of the nose, the neck, chest and back, either with the fingers or with a coin. The maneuver is said to be successful when it leaves a dark bruise mark on the skin, which always intrigues and alarms an uninformed foreigner, to the point of raising the question of possible trauma or poisoning. The cure is reputed to operate through the uncovering of the "phong" which has caused a cold, a shivering fever or a stroke.

Again, by the nature of his special attributes: commanding life and death, and masterminding the operation of mysterious forces in the universe, the physician commands veneration and demands absolute obedience. His pronouncements are definitive, and his decisions are without recourse. Most physicians undoubtedly, delight in wielding such an authority and have little motivation to change the situation and to foster more independence in their patients. But conversely, the patients often relish playing the easy role of passive recipients of miraculous gifts and carrying no responsibility for their treatment. In fact, being sick in an Asian culture is about the only time when an adult is allowed such a complete dependency and he can expect the most devoted attention and sacrifices from his family while he relinquishes all responsibilities toward himself and the others. By all standards, it represents so great a deviation from any normal social role that the indivi-

dual most likely will feel obliged to endure and to retain his composure for as long as possible and only give in when the pain or the physical disability has become too great to be ignored. Stoicism, highly valued as a strength of character, cuts down complaints and the groaning and moaning from patients and helps to make exceptionally "good" and compliant patients. Often-times, however, it keeps the patients from paying much attention to their discomfort and delays the call for help so that diseases are often discovered very late, in an advanced stage.

MEDICAL PRACTICE

The advent of modern medical science and techniques has modified but not completely erased all the traditional ideas. Medical practice in pre-Communist and I suspect--even in today's Indochina, is a composite picture of folk medicine, or at least folk medical beliefs, combined with concepts and techniques imported from the West, especially therapeutic procedures which have proved to be effective or which exhibit some special appeal because of their novel presentation. Antibiotics, for example, are in great demand and used rather indiscriminately as they can be obtained with no difficulty from the pharmacies. But the most enthusiastic reception has been reserved to the injectable medicines, not necessarily because they are efficacious, but because of the image of a therapeutic intervention most dramatic and most suggestive: the physician himself touching and giving help with his own hand, the medicine forcing its way into the organism to help its defenses.

This preference has given birth, in particular, to a special breed of health practitioner, the so-called "injectionists" whose specialty is to give injections in the patient's home or at their offices. These self-styled and self-educated paramedics either carry out orders for injections written by MDs, or more often, serve as the poor man's physician, prescribing or rather selling directly to the patient the medicines that they inject on the spot. The profession is lucrative thanks to a large clientele attracted by greater accessibility, both financial and physical as well as psychological, compared to physicians.

In parallel and still very lively, is the traditional medical system, with its herb doctors, its pharmacies and even its own hospitals, exclusively Chinese. Rivalry, even enmity, rarely ceases between the Western-style and the traditional medical systems; but most patients, pragmatic people that they are, feel that the duality works to their advantage as they can choose to go "Western" or "traditional" depending on whether they think that their disease may fit the specific strong points of either one of the two brands of medicine. For example, a female patient will go to a Chinese herb doctor for menstrual disorders, but will consult a Western-trained physician for her heart. In practice, the choice is often only temporary as the patient may change his horse (i.e. switch medicine), if results are too slow or fail to appear. Some, for fear of missing any bet, may even give a try to both Western and Chinese medicines, simultaneously or alternatively (to avoid any risk of incompatibility).

In real life, therefore, an Indochinese patient has various, multiple options when he falls sick: (1) self-medication with Western or traditional medicines, (2) injectionists, (3) Western-trained physicians, (4) traditional herb doctors, (5) magicians, sorcerers, (6) hospitals.

Hospitals are the last choice, rarely acceptable, except in the direst emergencies, and as the last resort, especially when nothing more can be done at home and the family can no longer take care of the patient. The family in fact, is so involved in the patient's condition and care that the whole sequence of a patient's medical treatment is really determined by his family's attitudes, resources and actions. A family member has escorted the patient to the doctor; other family members will medicate and nurse him at home. They will follow him to the hospital, stay with him, or have someone stay with him, or at least visit him regularly, if not everyday. The support given to the patient is invaluable but this may turn against him when the illness is prolonged and the attention and devotion given him become a burden materially and psychologically. On account of, or in prevision of such inconvenience, a necessary hospitalization may be sometimes delayed or denied or cut short. And a sojourn in an American hospital, where no family members are allowed to sleep in, is the most distressing.

At any rate, confusion often prevails and a patient's behavior, as a rule, tends to follow a zig-zag course, alternating between too many available options, and torn between conflicting solicitations, ideas and beliefs. The net result is an underutilization of the modern health facilities set up under the assumption that they are the sole answer to health needs.

MENTAL DISEASE

The confusion is still greater when we arrive at the domain of mental disease. To begin with, as an example, let us note that the appellation "psychiatrist" has no direct Vietnamese translation. The correct term (bac si tam tri) does not evoke any image for the man in the street, as it derives from a Chinese literacy word for mental doctor. Another name: bac si than kinh (nerve doctor) may receive better acceptance and get some response. But an explanation about a specialist treating crazy people is even more understandable.

This point of semantics summarizes the dilemma of psychiatry as it is being defined by the two poles: as medicine of the nerves or medicine of the insane. At one end, the organic model which explains mental disease in terms of a damaged nervous sytem. At the other end, the supernaturalistic viewpoint which emphasizes its mysterious and bizarre features, and for a want of simple rational causation, postulates the intervention of magical, occult forces.

In the particular case of the Vietnamese, the organic hypothesis starts from the notion that the nervous system is the source of all human activities and especially mental activities. Any change in the level or the form of these activities must then reflect some disturbances in the function of the nervous system. It is no coincidence that Vietnamese, along with the Chinese have adopted the translation of neurosis as "than kinh suy nhuoc" (weakness of the nerves) and psychosis as "than kinh thac loan" (turmoil of the nerves). In practice, "weakness of the nerves" is the standard complaint and also the stock explanation put forth in most minor mental disorders, from anxiety to depression, sometimes including mental retardation or mental deterioration. Not only is the explanation reassuring in its simplicity, it also promises that the treatment will be simple and straightforward as it would suffice to re-establish the adequate level of the nervous system functions to clean up all the symptoms. A good doctor, therefore, should be able to prescribe medi-

cines to restore the nerve energy, e.g. a nerve tonic, or to control the nerve functions, e.g. a tranquilizer. Drugs are deemed a natural response to mental disease; yet, on the other hand, there is great wariness about such medicines as they can change your mind or make you dependent upon them.

The second system of explanation treats mental disease as a supernatural event. A person becomes obsessed or insane as a retribution for an offense against a divinity or an effect of his moral turpitude. The fault may be due to ignorance or to inadvertence, or sometimes just sheer bad luck as when the patient happens to cross the path of a nasty demon. The sin could be his or his family's, which makes him guilty by association. In all events, there is or there has been some evil in the patient which must be expiated or pardoned through prayers and offerings or magical counter-measures. And as a consequence, a mental condition is viewed as a stigma which brings disgrace to the family and must be covered up and hidden from the public view, lest it become a handicap to other family members who seek marriage and alliance.

With such a view of mental disease, psychological factors are rarely recognized as a major determinant factor. Our folklore abounds in romantic tales in which the heroes perish out of langour from an unresponded love. Oral traditions also transmit stories in which extreme anger or sudden fright disturb humours and cause instant folly or death. In actual practice, though such explanations are sometimes offered, without too much conviction, as the correlation is rarely obvious between the supposed precipitating event and the severely disturbed behavior. At any rate, psychological factors are understood as being operative only in their extreme degree of intensity, while subtler inner feelings and emotional difficulties, so-called "of normal daily living" are rarely taken into account, as they are the lot of every human being who should be able to cope with them on his own.

The diagnostic process in the above framework predictably is arduous and problematic. In the first place, most patients feel obliged by their culture to pull themselves together and behave in ways they think will not betray their "weakness", i.e. not disclosing their disarray or distress.

At any rate, any disease in the family is a collective responsibility and the family will try its utmost to take care of its own. The practical result is that most psychiatric casualties will seek professional help only at the last extremity, but even then, the extent of the pathology and the disability may not be immediately apparent, again because of the cultural pressure to put on a good face notwithstanding the extreme distress.

The presenting complaints are much along the line of a culture which favours the suppression and repression of negative, aggressive feelings, with the inner turmoils forceably contained and carefully kept out of view. The repressive mechanism, in fact, is so effective that even instances of psychotic breakdowns in Vietnamese patients rarely present episodes of violence, contrary to what one witnesses in some other cultures, the Malays-Indonesian group for example, in which "amok" or psychotic violent rage is quite a common occurrence.

The most frequent complaints from non-psychotic patients are those of physical discomfort. Neurotic patients, therefore, will go to the doctor for their headaches, back pain, insomnia...instead of seeking relief for depression, anxiety... In that way, they are assured of being understood and of

receiving the attention, care and sympathy which they will not obtain if they have brought forth complaints of worry, despair or discontent. In these instances, the cultural viewpoint is that such disclosure is an indiscretion and a sign of weakness. Also no external assistance should be expected for emotional problems which are considered a personal matter, to be resolved by oneself or at the most, with some help from the family or one's most intimate friends. Some authors also have explained the tendency to somatize in most Asian populations by the fact that traditional child-rearing practice is very permissive and over-responsive in regard to the child's demands so that the behavior is learned which assimilates any distress to physical discomfort and incites the individual to present it in such a way as to warrant immediate relief, i.e. by being cuddled, being fed, or recomforted...

The closest a patient can ever get to mentioning psychological problems is when he speaks of difficulties in areas of inter-personal relationships in his family or at work. In this domain, information is given without too much fear of leaving him exposed as he presents only material which is of public knowledge. But even so, the continues to be restrained by a culture which bars the open and direct expression of aggressive and negative feelings, so that one should always expect to hear mostly understatements about anger or resentment...

Problems of aggression, though rare, are not unknown, but tend to be translated into antisocial behavior such as gambling or drinking, rather than naked violence. An exception would be situations when aggressive instincts can be expressed without too much social reprobation or fear of retribution. This is the case of intrafamilial violence: wife beating, chld abuse, the latter case being much less frequent than the former. War also has brought some changes by giving license to individuals to unleash their drive toward violence and be approved, or at least go unpunished. The temptation then is stronger, especially for the young adult refugees, especially those formerly in the military, to give in to their impulses, although to a lesser degree than one could have expected.

Except in the lowest socio-economic group, alcoholism has rarely been a problem in Vietnam, thanks maybe to a rather narrowly defined social use of alcohol. Alcohol primarily is a vehicle for socialization and as such is often consumed in banquets, weddings, celebrations... Its use is intended almost exclusively for men and it often stands up as a symbol of masculinity which sometimes incites men to emulate each other and test out their respective imbibitory capacity. Alcohol is also well-known for its properties for interfering with an individual's perceptions and feelings. It is quite a familiar outlet for depression, socially tolerated but better left either to a few exceptional persons such as poets, eccentrics or geniuses, or to weaklings who seek the easy way out. At any rate, women are expected not to drink, drunkeness means lack of self-control and solitary drinking is rarely acceptable. Also, most Vietnamese react to alcohol with a very accentuated facial congestion and pronounced neuro-vegetative symptoms which may help to deter any excessive intake.

The situation regarding alcoholism has somewhat deteriorated after the exodus with this same group of young single male refugees, who, without a family, and feeling devoid of any social constraints or attachment, except to their own loosely organized peer group, use drink as a macho-type gesture of anger and defiance. Alcohol is used as a way of overcoming their grief and

guilt, and also is an expression of solidarity between members of their group. Again, characteristically, most libations are collective and instances are rare of solitary drinking.

Except for opium which is considered passe and used by older people, substance abuse (heroin, amphetamines) back in Vietnam was mostly limited to the younger segment of the urban population, students, artists and camp-followers hanging around American GI encampments. We have no report of the problem among the refugee population.

Gambling is a perennial scourge in most Asian societies, perhaps because of the economic conditions which tempt people to try the easy way to overcome their poverty. We have reports that in various refugee communities throughout the country, this is becoming a rampant and increasingly severe problem, especially among the unattached, single males.

A Vietnamese psychiatrist rarely, if ever, sees these kinds of problems in his office, as psychosocial difficulties are considered the ordinary plight of a human being who is obliged to make do with what is being given by his environment and to achieve the desired harmony on his own. A more constant staple of the Mental Health professional is the grossly disturbed psychotic whose extravagant behavior could no longer be contained or reduced through ordinary persuasion or intimidation. Most likely, the patient will arrive at his office or at the hospital when all other treatment methods have failed, as the Western-style psychiatrist is deemed a poor answer to a problem caused by demons and spirits or disturbed body humours. In fact, in no other field than mental disease, is such a premium still placed on magical interventions. Amulets, incantation, sacrifices, exorcism rituals are considered the logical treatment for demonical possession or evil curses that made the patient lose his mind. Folk medicine and Chinese medicine with their metaphysical explanations also appeal to the populace because of the mysterious symptoms. At any rate, the treatment always includes some medication or physical procedure, not only as the tangible evidence of the therapeutic intervention, but in all logic, as the only reasonable answer to the complaints of physical discomfort or of physical causative factors brought forth by the patient or his family. Again, if disease is perceived as a magical process, medication is counter-magic, and in the eyes of a believer, the little vial of Valium or Thorazine is not so different from the magic water blessed by the sorcerer.

In this setting, psychotherapy or "talk" therapy, the form of treatment greatly favored in the United States, could rarely be implemented or even visualized as anything but an adjunct form of treatment. Just the idea of sitting down to talk your troubles over to a stranger, even to a physician, is foreign and almost comic to most Vietnamese. In practice, however, they do talk and they do tell about themselves and their problems, but with a different emphasis and in a different frame of mind. A Vietnamese patient does not go to a therapist with the conscious determination to open himself up to seek relief for his emotional difficulties. He confides in a doctor or in a social worker because he/she is a sympathetic listener, a person of experience, mainly because this is an occasion of venting his emotions which may have become too much for him to bear alone. Rarely, if ever, does he regard or use this information as something that is directly relevant to his discomfort. The stories that he gives most likely are factual, rarely impressionistic. He will gloss over his states of mind, avoid mentioning inner feelings, depict only events, and analyze problems related to other people,

not himself. Not infrequently, he may see the necessity of describing his sentiments and of looking at himself, but what he expects from the therapist or his interlocutor is less some assistance towards gaining insight than an active and positive intervention, to provide guidance and direction. Here again, the physician is viewed as the omniscient, omnipotent authority figure which will take over the responsibility of the treatment, asking the patient only to be docile and compliant.

Insight-oriented psychotherapy on the Western model is not inconceivable or impossible, but in light of the socio-cultural characteristics of this population, seems to have a lesser chance of being accepted than a supportive or directive type, and even less than an eclectic approach, combining drug treatment with a psychological or rather psychosocial handling of the existential problems. In any case, it pays to keep in mind the cultural dimensions of the patient's personality and to set up the goals of therapy to be as consistent as possible with the values of the group. For example, though it is always desirable to foster independence in a patient, too forceful a push towards shaking loose all bonds of dependency in regard to the family may confuse the patient, alienate his family and wreck his most valuable primary support system.

Working with the family presents many pitfalls. The family usually is very quick to respond to the therapist's orders for anything but to talk about their difficulties among themselves. The children are wary of being disrespectful of their parents if they express negative feelings; the parents feel uneasy baring their emotions in the presence of their children. What most family therapy sessions end up with is often a general cover-up as everybody tries to protect the others and the good reputation of the whole unit. Directives and instructions from the therapist are received without questioning, but only partially implemented because of the mental reservations family members have not dared express in public.

Coming to the United States, Indochinese refugees have modified part of their behavior in an attempt to fit in the new social order. Traditional values and beliefs however, apparently, have withstood the challenge of the new environment, and conflicts are still going strong which often belie the refugees' professed conformism.

In the domain of health and mental health, the result has been often an under-utilization of services foreign to their customs or contrary to their cultural tenets.

We all know about the multitude of problems which are confronting the refugees. We also realize the reasons why they have not asked for help or why they only did it at the last extremity: Just presented their views and their expectations about the help they want.

The conclusion which should be drawn from all this is that if something is to be done, it should be done in a manner which could be understood, accepted and appreciated by our clients. This, we believe, can be achieved with the existent resources available in the community provided that we have some additional money and some inventiveness.

INDOCHINESE RESETTLEMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

STATE OF ILLINOIS

Refugee Resettlement Program
Illinois Department of Public Aid/
Bureau of Social Services
2036 S. Michigan Ave., 7th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60616
(312) 793-7121
DIRECTOR: Dr. Edwin Silverman
(State Program Coordinator; information and referral; resource development)

Illinois Department of Public Health
Disease Control
525 West Jefferson
Springfield, Illinois 62702
(217) 782-3984
CONTACT: Al Grant
(Coordinate health services)

Truman College/Indochinese Program
1145 W. Wilson
Chicago, Illinois 60640
(312) 878-1700 x 2173
CONTACT: Duong Van Tran
(English language, job development and employment counseling, training programs)

Refugee Relief Program
Illinois Department of Public Aid
55 West Cermak Road
Chicago, Illinois 60616
(312) 793-2740
CONTACT: Marguerite McKissack

VOLUNTARY AGENCIES CONSORTIUM

Jewish Federation - Voluntary Agencies Consortium (VOLAG)
1 South Franklin
Chicago, Illinois 60606
(312) 346-6700
CONTACT: Burt Shulimson, Jan Moreno
(Coordinate volag consortium)

Catholic Charities (VOLAG)
645 West Randolph
Chicago, Illinois 60606
(312) 236-5172
CONTACT: Judy Masterman, Mary Wodarczyk

Jewish Vocational Service (VOLAG)
201 North Wells
Chicago, Illinois 60601
(312) 454-1260
CONTACT: Celia Jacobs

Lutheran Child & Family Services (VOLAG)
7620 Madison
River Forest, Illinois 60302
(312) 287-4848
CONTACT: Max Heinz

Travelers Aid Society/ISSOP (VOLAG)
1046 West Wilson
Chicago, Illinois 60640
(312) 435-4527
CONTACT: Steve Voss

Jewish Family & Community Service (VOLAG)
1 South Franklin
Chicago, Illinois 60606
(312) 347-6700
CONTACT: Betty Dayron

ADULT EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
(Instructional, vocational, social services statewide)

Illinois Adult Indochinese Refugee
Education Consortium
500 South Dwyer Avenue
Arlington Heights, Illinois 60005
(312) 870-4159
COORDINATOR: Mrs. Tipawan Reed
(Coordinate educational, social and
educational services statewide)

Alton YWCA
304 E. Third Street
Alton, Illinois 62002
(681) 465-7774
CONTACT: Lucille M. Layne

Asian Human Services
3745 N. Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60640
(312) 871-3840
CONTACT: Nghia Nguyen
(No employment services)

Belleville Area College
2500 Carlyle Road
Belleville, Illinois 62221
(618) 235-2700
CONTACT: Ann Hare

Black Hawk College
Moline Adult Learning Center
2519 Fourth Avenue
Moline, Illinois 61265
(309) 797-5017
CONTACT: Duc Hong To

Bloomington Public Schools
1201 East Locust
Bloomington, Illinois 61701
(309) 438-5961
CONTACT: John Boyd

Catholic Social Service
2900 West Heading
Peoria, Illinois 61604
(309) 671-5735
CONTACT: Lynda Krueger

Champaign Co. Industrialization Ctr.
202 West Columbia
Champaign, Illinois 61820
(217) 352-2522
CONTACT: Judith Sissner

Chinese American Service League
219 West Cermak
Chicago, Illinois 60616
(312) 791-0418
CONTACT: Bernarda Wong

Elgin YWCA
220 East Chicago Street
Elgin, Illinois 60120
(312) 742-7930
CONTACT: Joan Berna

Dr. M.L. King Education Center
720 North Greenwood Avenue
Kankakee, Illinois 60901
(815) 932-5426
CONTACT: Sr. Marianne Cardosi

Kishwaukee College
Indochinese Program
Malta, Illinois 60150
(815) 825-2086 x 360
CONTACT: Jim Grinnel

Korean American Community Services
4415-17 North Clark
Chicago, Illinois 60640
(312) 275-1060
CONTACT: Hyun Shin
(employment services only)

Joliet Township High Schools
Adult Education Program
201 East Jefferson
(815) 727-6890
CONTACT: Robert Beach

Southern Illinois University
Evaluation & Development Center
611 East College
Carbondale, Illinois 62901
(618) 453-2331
CONTACT: Steve Schumacher

Peoria Adult Education Center
1205 West First Street
Peoria, Illinois 61605
(309) 672-6702
CONTACT: Dick Young
(Instructional only)

Richland Community College
2425 Federal Drive
Decatur, Illinois 62526
(217) 875-7200
CONTACT: Dr. Albert Green

Rock Valley College
Apprenticeship Training Center
500 South Independence
Rockford, Illinois 61102
(815) 968-4151
CONTACT: Mike Kelley

Springfield Public Schools
Lawrence Adult Center
101 East Laurel
Springfield, Illinois 62703
(217) 525-3147
CONTACT: Kiem Maxfield

Statewide ESL/AE Service Center
500 South Dwyer Avenue
Arlington Heights, Illinois 60005
(312) 870-4157
CONTACT: Joanna Escobar
(staff development activities)

Thornton Community College
15800 South State Street
South Holland, Illinois 60473
(312) 331-0818
CONTACT: Walter Calgaro

NON-CONSORTIUM PROGRAMS

American Refugee Committee
317 W. Howard Street Room 201
Evanston, Illinois 60202
(312) 328-1620
CONTACT: Roberta Kelinson

Bishop's Resettlement Center
1 S 101 St. 53 P.O. Box 2146
Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137
(312) 790-1130
CONTACT: Reverend Robert Perkins
(Resettlement services)

Catholic Charities
921 West State Street
Rockford, Illinois 61102
(815) 965-0623
CONTACT: Dave Hougan
(Resettlement services)

Catholic Charities
108 East Cook
Springfield, Illinois 62704
(217) 523-4551
(Resettlement services)

Catholic Social Service
8315 State Street
Belleville, Illinis 62203
(618) 397-5700
(Resettlement Services)

Elgin Community College
1[illegible] N. Channing
Elgin, Illinois 60120
(312) 697-6090
CONTACT: Phet Oudom
(Vocational trng., resettlement srv.

World Relief
P.O. Box WRC
Wheaton, Illinois 60187
(312) 665-0265
CONTACT: Jerry Ballard